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AUDLOW



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From Henry Wood
Nov 37.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

" We spake of many a vanished scene,
Of what we once had thought and said,
Of what had been, and might have been,
And who was changed, and who was dead."
LONGFELLOW.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
NEW BURLINGTON STREET,
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty.
1874.

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*These Stories, by "JOHNNY LUDLOW," are
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CONTENTS.

VOLUME I.

	PAGE
I. LOSING LENA	1
II. FINDING BOTH OF THEM	31
III. WOLFE BARRINGTON'S TAMING	54
IV. MAJOR PARRIFER	94
V. COMING HOME TO HIM	125
VI. LEASE, THE POINTSMAN	156
VII. AUNT DEAN	192
VIII. GOING THROUGH THE TUNNEL	229
IX. DICK MITCHEL	261

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JOHNNY LUDLOW.

I.

LOSING LENA.

WE lived chiefly at Dyke Manor. A fine old place, so close upon the borders of Warwickshire and Worcestershire, that many people did not know which of the two counties it was really in. The house was in Warwickshire, but some of the land was in Worcestershire. The Squire had, however, another estate, Crabb Cot, all in Worcestershire, and very many miles nearer to Worcester.

Squire Todhetley was rich. But he lived in the plain, good old-fashioned way that his forefathers had lived; almost a homely way, it might be called, in contrast with the show and parade springing up of late years. He was respected by every body, and though hotheaded and impetuous, he was simple-minded, open-handed, and had as good a heart as any body ever had in this world. An elderly gentleman now, was he, of middle height, with a portly form and a red face; and his hair, what was left

of it, consisted of a few scanty lightish locks, standing up straight on the top of his head.

The squire had married, but not very early in life. His wife died in a few years, leaving one child only; a son, named after his father, Joseph. Young Joe was just the pride of the Manor and of his father's heart.

I, writing this, am Johnny Ludlow. And you will naturally want to hear what I did at Dyke Manor, and why I lived there.

About three miles' distance from the Manor was a place called the Court. Not a property of so much importance as the Manor, but a nice place, for all that. It belonged to my father, William Ludlow. He and Squire Todhetley were good friends. I was the only child, just as Tod was; and, like him, I had lost my mother. They had christened me John but always called me Johnny. I can remember many incidents of my early life now, but I cannot recal to my mind my mother. She must have died; at least, I fancy so; when I was two years old.

One morning, two years after that, when I was about four, the servants told me I had a new mamma. I can see her now as she looked when she came home: tall and thin and upright, with a long face, pinched nose, a meek expression, and gentle voice. She was a Miss Marks, who used to play the organ at church, and had hardly any income at all. Hannah

said she was sure she was thirty-five if she was a day—she was talking to Eliza while she dressed me—and they both agreed that she would probably turn out to be a Tartar, and that the master might have chosen better. I understood quite well that they meant papa, and asked why he might have chosen better; upon which they shook me and said they had not been speaking of my papa at all, but of the old blacksmith round the corner. Hannah brushed my hair the wrong way, and Eliza went off to see to her bedrooms. Children are easily prejudiced: and they prejudiced me against my new mother. Looking at her by the improved eyes of maturer years, I know that though she might be poor in pocket, she was good and kindly, and every inch a lady.

Papa died that same year. At the end of another year, Mrs. Ludlow, my stepmother, married Squire Todhetley, and we went to live at Dyke Manor; she, I, and my nurse Hannah. The Court was let for a term of years to the Sterlings.

Young Joe did not like the new arrangements. He was older than I, could take up prejudices more strongly, and he took a mighty strong one against the new Mrs. Todhetley. He had been regularly indulged by his father and spoilt by all the servants; so it was only to be expected that he would not like the invasion. Mrs. Todhetley introduced order into the pro-

fuse household, hitherto governed by the servants. They and young Joe equally resented it; they refused to see that things were really more comfortable than they used to be, and at half the cost.

Two babies came to the Manor; Hugh first, Lena next. Joe and I were sent to school. He was as big as a house, compared with me, tall and strong and dark, with an imperious way and will of his own. I was fair, gentle, timid, yielding to him in all things. His was the master spirit, swaying mine at will. At school the boys at once, the very first day we entered, shortened his name from Todhetley to Tod. I caught the habit, and from that time I never called him anything else.

And so the years went on. Tod and I at school being drilled into learning; Hugh and Lena growing into nice little children. During the holidays, hot war waged between Tod and his stepmother. At least, *silent* war. Mrs. Todhetley was always kind to him, and she never quarrelled; but Tod opposed her in many things, and would be generally sarcastically cool to her in manner.

We did lead the children into mischief, and she complained of that. Tod did, that is, and of course I followed where he led. "But we can't let Hugh grow up a milksop, you know, Johnny," he would say to me; "and he would, if left to his mother." So Hugh's clothes in

Tod's hands came to grief, and Hugh himself sometimes. Hannah, who was the children's nurse now, stormed and scolded over it: she and Tod had ever been at daggers drawn with each other; and Mrs. Todhetley would implore Tod with tears in her eyes to be careful with the child. Tod appeared to turn a deaf ear, and marched off with Hugh before their very eyes. He really loved the children, and would have saved them from injury with his life. The Squire drove and rode his fine horses. Mrs. Todhetley had set up a low basket-chaise drawn by a mild she-donkey: it was safer for the children, she said. Tod went into fits whenever he met the turn-out.

But Tod was not always to escape scot-free, or incite the children to rebellion with impunity. There came a day when he brought himself, through it, to a state of repentance and self-torture.

It occurred when we were at home for the summer holidays, just after the crop of hay was got in, and the bare fields looked as white in the blazing sun as if they had been scorched. Tod and I were in the three-cornered meadow next the fold-yard. He was making a bat-net with gauze and two sticks. Young Jacobson had shown us his the previous day, and a bat he caught with it; and Tod thought he would catch bats too. But he did not seem to be making much hand at the net, and somehow

managed to send the pointed end of the stick through a corner of it.

"I don't think that gauze is strong enough, Tod."

"I am afraid it is not, Johnny. Here, catch hold of it. I'll go in-doors, and see if they can't find me some better. Hannah must have some."

He flew off past the ricks, and leaped the little gate into the fold-yard—a tall, strong fellow, who might leap the Avon. In a few minutes I heard his voice again, and went to meet him. Tod was coming away from the house with Lena.

"Have you the gauze, Tod?"

"Not a bit of it; that old cat won't look for any; says she hasn't time. I'll hinder her time a little. Come along, Lena."

The "old cat" was Hannah. I told you she and he were often at daggers drawn. Hannah had a chronic complaint, ill-temper, and Tod called her names to her face. Upon going in to ask her for the gauze, he found her dressing Hugh and Lena to go out, and she just turned him out of the nursery, and told him not to bother her then with his gauze and his wants. Lena ran after Tod; she liked him better than all of us put together. She had on a blue silk frock, and a white straw hat with daisies round it; open-work stockings were on a pretty little legs. By which we saw she was about to be taken out for show.

“What are you going to do with her, Tod?”

“I’m going to hide her,” answered Tod, in his decisive voice. “Keep where you are, Johnny.”

Lena enjoyed the rebellion. In a minute or two Tod came back alone. He had left her between the ricks in the three-cornered field, and told her not to come out. Then he went off to the front of the house, and I stood inside the barn, talking to Mack, who was hammering away at the iron of the cart-wheel. Out came Hannah by-and-by. She had been dressing herself as well as Hugh.

“Miss Lena!”

No answer. Hannah called again, and then came up the fold-yard, looking about.

“Master Johnny, have you seen the child?”

“What child?” I was not going to spoil Tod’s sport by telling her.

“Miss Lena. She has got off somewhere, and my mistress is waiting for her in the basket-chaise.”

“I see her just now along of Master Joseph,” spoke up Mack, arresting his noisy hammer.

“See her where?” asked Hannah.

“Close here, a-going that way.”

He pointed with the hammer to the palings and gate that divided the yard from the three-cornered field. Hannah ran there and stood looking over. The ricks were within a short stone’s throw, but Lena kept close. Hannah

called out again, and threw her eyes over the empty field.

"The child's not there. Where can she have got to, tiresome little thing?"

In the house, and about the house, and out of the house, as the old riddle says, went Hannah. It was jolly to see her. Mrs. Todhetley and Hugh were seated patiently in the basket-chaise before the hall-door, wondering what made Hannah so long. Tod, playing with the mild she-donkey's ears, and laughing to himself, stood talking graciously to his step-mother. I went round. The Squire had gone riding to Evesham; Dwarf Giles, who made the nattiest little groom in the county, for all his five-and-thirty years, behind him.

"I can't find Miss Lena," cried Hannah, coming out.

"Not find Miss Lena!" echoed Mrs. Todhetley. "What do you mean, Hannah? Have you not dressed her?"

"I dressed her first, ma'am, before Master Hugh, and she went out of the nursery. I can't think where she can have got to. I've searched everywhere."

"But, Hannah, we must have her directly; I am late as it is."

They were going over to the Court to a children's early party at the Sterlings. Mrs. Todhetley stepped out of the basket-chaise, to help in the search.

"I had better fetch her, Tod," I whispered.

He nodded yes. Tod never bore malice, and I suppose he thought Hannah had had enough of a hunt for that day. I ran through the fold-yard to the ricks, and called to Lena.

"You can come out now, little stupid."

But no Lena answered. There were seven ricks in a group, and I went into all the openings between them. Lena was not there. It was rather odd, and I looked across the field and towards the lane and the coppice, shouting out sturdily.

"Mack, have you seen Miss Lena pass in doors?" I stayed to ask him, in going back.

No: Mack had not noticed her; and I went round to the front again, and whispered to Tod.

"What a muff you are, Johnny! She's between the ricks fast enough. No danger that she'd come out when I told her to stay!"

"But she's not there indeed, Tod. You go and look."

Tod vaulted off, his long legs seeming to take flying leaps, like a deer's, on his way to the ricks.

To make short of the story, Lena was gone. Lost. The house, the out-door buildings, the gardens were searched for her, and she was not to be found. Mrs. Todhetley's fears flew to the ponds at first; but it was impossible she could have come to grief in either of the

two, as they were both in view of the barn-door where I and Mack had been. Tod avowed that he had put her amid the ricks to hide; and it was not to be imagined she had gone. The most feasible conjecture was, that she had run from between the ricks when Hannah called to her, and was hiding in the lane.

Tod was in a fever, loudly threatening Lena with unheard-of whippings, to cover his real concern. Hannah looked red, Mrs. Todhetley white. I was standing by him when the cook came up; a sharp woman, with red-brown eyes. We called her Molly.

"Mr. Joseph," said she, "I have heard of gipsies stealing children."

"Well?" returned Tod.

"There was one at the door a while ago— an insolent one, too. Perhaps Miss Lena——"

"Which way did she go?—which door was she at?" burst forth Tod.

"'Twas a man, sir. He come up to the kitchen-door, and steps inside as bold as brass, asking me to buy some wooden skewers he'd cut, and saying something about a sick child. When I told him to march, that we never encouraged tramps here, he wanted to answer me, and I just shut the door in his face. A regular gipsy, if ever I see one," continued Molly; "his skin tawny and his wild hair jet-black. Maybe, in revenge, he have stole off the little miss."

Tod took up the notion, and his face turned

white. "Don't say anything of this to Mrs. Todhetley," he said to Molly. "We must just scour the country."

But in departing from the kitchen-door, the gipsy man could not by any possibility have made his way to the rick-field direct without going through the fold-yard. And he had not done that. It was true that Lena might have run round and got in the gipsy's way. Unfortunately, none of the men were about, except Mack and old Thomas. Tod sent these off in different directions; Mrs. Todhetley drove away in her pony-chaise to the lanes round, saying the child might have strayed there; Molly and the maids started elsewhere; and I and Tod went flying along a bye-road that branched off in a line, as it were, from the kitchen-door. Nobody could keep up with Tod, he went so fast; and I was not tall and strong as he was. But I saw what Tod in his haste did not see—a dark man, with some bundles of skewers and a stout stick, walking on the other side of the hedge. I whistled Tod back again.

"What is it, Johnny?" he said, panting. "Have you seen her?"

"Not her. But look there. That must be the man Molly spoke of."

Tod crashed through the hedge as if it had been so many cobwebs, and accosted the gipsy. I followed more carefully, but got my face scratched.

“Were you up at the great house, begging, a short while ago?” demanded Tod, in an awful passion.

The man turned round on Tod with a face of brass. I say brass, because he did it so independently; but it was not an insolent face in itself; rather a sad one, and very sickly.

“What’s that you ask me, master?”

“I ask whether it was you who were at the Manor-house just now, begging?” fiercely repeated Tod.

“I was at a big house offering wares for sale, if you mean that, sir. I wasn’t begging.”

“Call it what you please,” said Tod, growing white again. “What have you done with the little girl?”

For, you see, Tod had fully caught up the impression that the gipsy *had* stolen Lena, and he spoke in accordance with it.

“I’ve seen no little girl, master.”

“You have,” and Tod gave his foot a stamp. “What have you done with her?”

The man’s only answer was to turn round and walk off, muttering to himself. Tod pursued him, calling him a thief and other names; but nothing more satisfactory could he get.

“He can’t have taken her, Tod. If he had, she’d be with him now. He couldn’t eat her, you know.”

“He may have given her to a confederate.”

“What to do? What do gipsies steal children for?”

Tod stopped in a passion, lifting his hand. “If you torment me with these frivolous questions, Johnny, I’ll strike you. How do I know what’s done with stolen children? Sold, perhaps. I’d give a hundred pounds out of my pocket at this minute if I knew where those gipsies were encamped.”

We suddenly lost the fellow. Tod had been keeping him in sight in the distance. Whether he disappeared up a gum-tree, or into a rabbit-hole, Tod couldn’t tell; but gone he was.

Up this lane, down that; over that moor, across this common; so raced Tod and I. And the afternoon wore away, and we had changed our direction a dozen times: which possibly was not wise.

The sun was getting low as we passed Ragley gates, for we had finally got into the Alcester road. Tod was going to do what we ought to have done at first: report the loss at Alcester. Somebody came riding along on a stumpy pony. It proved to be Gruff Blossom, groom to the Jacobsons. They called him “Gruff” because of his temper. He did touch his hat to us, which was as much as you could say, and spurred the stumpy animal on. But Tod made a sign to him, and he was obliged to stop and listen.

“The gipsies stole off little Miss Lena!”

cried old Blossom, coming out of his gruffness. "That's a rum go! Ten to one if you find her for a year to come."

"But, Blossom, what do they do with the children they steal?" I asked, in a sort of agony.

"They cuts their hair off and dyes their skins brown and then takes 'em out to fairs a ballad-singing," answered Blossom.

"But why need they do it, when they have children of their own?"

"Ah, well, that's a question I couldn't answer," said old Blossom. "Maybe their'n arn't pretty childern—Miss Lena, she is pretty."

"Have you heard of any gipsies being encamped about here?" Tod demanded of him.

"Not lately, Mr. Joseph. Five or six months ago, there was a lot 'camped on the Markis's ground. They warn't there long."

"Can't you ride about, Blossom, and see after the child?" asked Tod, putting something into his hand.

Old Blossom pocketed it, and went off with a nod. He was riding about, as we knew afterwards, for hours. Tod made straight for the police-station at Alcester, and told his tale. Not a soul was there but Jenkins, one of the men.

"I haven't seen no suspicious characters about," said Jenkins, who seemed to be eating something. He was a big man, with short

black hair combed on his forehead, and he had a habit of turning his face upwards, as if looking after his nose—a square ornament, that stood up straight.

“She is between four and five years old ; a very pretty child, with blue eyes, and a good deal of curling auburn hair,” said Tod, who was getting feverish.

Jenkins wrote it down—“Name, Todhetley. What Christian name?”

“Adalena, called ‘Lena.’”

“Recollect the dress, sir?”

“Pale blue silk ; straw hat with wreath of daisies round it ; open-worked white stockings, and thin black shoes ; white drawers, finished off with tatting stuff,” recounted Tod, as if he had prepared the list by heart coming along.

“That’s bad, that dress is,” said Jenkins, putting down the pen.

“Why is it bad?”

“’Cause the things is tempting. Quite half the children that gets stole is stole for what they’ve got upon their backs. Tramps and that sort will run a risk for a blue silk, specially if it’s clean and glistening, that they’d not run for a brown holland pinafore. Auburn curls too,” added Jenkins, shaking his head ; “that’s a temptation also. I’ve knowed children sent back home with bare heads afore now. Any ornaments, sir?”

“She was safe to have on her little gold

neck-chain and cross. They are very small, Jenkins—not worth much.”

Jenkins lifted his nose—not in disdain, it was a habit he had. “Not worth much to you, sir, who could buy such any day, but an uncommon bait to professional child-stealers. Were the cross a coral, or any stone of that sort?”

“It was a small gold cross, and the chain was thin. They could only be seen when her cloak was off. Oh, I forgot the cloak; it was white: llama, I think they call it. She was going to a child’s party.”

Some more questions and answers, most of which Jenkins took down. Handbills were to be printed and posted, and a reward offered on the morrow, if she was not found previously. Then we came away; there was nothing more to do at the station.

“Wouldn’t it have been better, Tod, had Jenkins gone out seeking her and telling of the loss abroad, instead of waiting to write all that down?”

“Johnny, if we don’t find her to-night, I shall go mad,” was all he answered.

He went back down Alcester Street at a rushing walk—not a run.

“Where are you going now?” I asked.

“I’m going up hill and down dale till I find that gipsies’ encampment. You can go on home, Johnny, if you are tired.”

I had not felt tired till we were in the police-station. Excitement keeps fatigue off. But I was not going to give in, and said I should keep with him.

“All right, Johnny.”

Before we were clear of Alcester, Budd the land-agent came up. He was turning out of the public-house at the corner. It was dusk then. Tod laid hold of him.

“Budd, you are about always, in all kinds of by-nooks and lanes : can you tell me of any encampment of gipsies between here and the Manor-house ?”

The agent’s business took him abroad a great deal, you know, into the rural districts around.

“Gipsies’ encampment ?” repeated Budd, giving both of us a stare. “There’s none that I know of. In the spring, a lot of them had the impudence to squat down on the Marquis’s ——”

“Oh, I know all that,” interrupted Tod. “Is there nothing of the sort about now ?”

“I saw a miserable little tent to-day up Cookhill way,” said Budd. “It might have been a gipsy’s or a travelling tinker’s. ’Twasn’t of much account, whichever it was.”

Tod gave a sort of spring. “Whereabouts ?” was all he asked. And Budd explained where. Tod went off like a shot, and I after him.

If you are familiar with Alcester, or have visited at Ragley or anything of that, you

must know the long green lane leading to Cookhill ; it is dark with overhanging trees, and up-hill all the way. We took that road—Tod first, and I last ; and we came to the top, and turned in the direction Budd had described the tent to be.

It was not to be called dark ; the nights never are at midsummer ; and rays from the bright light in the west glimmered through the trees. On the outskirts of the coppice, in a bit of low ground, we saw the tent, a little mite of a thing, looking no better than a funnel turned upside down. Sounds were heard within it, and Tod put his finger on his lip while he listened. But we were too far off, and he took his boots off, and crept up close.

Sounds of wailing—of somebody in pain. But that Tod had been three parts out of his senses all the afternoon, he might have known at once that they did not come from Lena, or any one so young. Words were mingled with them in a woman's voice ; uncouth in its accents, nearly non-understandable in its language, an awful sadness in its tone.

“ A bit longer ! a bit longer, Corry, and he'd ha' been back. You needn't ha' grudged it to us. Oh——h ! if ye had but waited a bit longer ! ”

I don't write exactly as she spoke ; I shouldn't know how to spell it : we made a guess at half the words. Tod, who had grown white

again, put on his boots, and lifted up the opening of the tent.

I had never seen any scene like that ; I don't suppose I shall see another. About a foot from the ground was a raised surface of some sort, thickly covered with dark-green rushes, just the size and shape of a gravestone. A little child, about as old as Lena, lay on it, a white cloth thrown across her, just touching the white, still face. A torch, blazing and smoking away, was thrust into the ground and lighted up the scene. Whiter the face looked now, because it had been tawney in life. I'd rather see one of our faces dead than a gipsy's. The contrast between the white face and dress of the child, and the green bed of rushes it lay on was something remarkable. A young woman, dark too, and handsome enough to create a commotion at the fair, knelt down, her brown hands uplifted ; a gaudy ring on one of the fingers, worth sixpence perhaps when new, sparkling in the torchlight. Tod strode up to the dead face and looked at it for full ten minutes. I do believe he thought at first that it was Lena.

"What is this ?" he asked.

"It is my dead child !" the woman answered. "She did not wait that her father might see her die !"

But Tod had got his head full of Lena, and looked around. "Is there no other child here?"

As if to answer him, a bundle of rags came out of a corner and set up a howl. It was a boy about seven, and our going in had woke him up. The woman sat down on the ground and looked at us.

"We have lost a child—a little girl," explained Tod. "I thought she might have been brought here—or have strayed here."

"I've lost *my* girl," said the woman. "Death has come for her!" And, in speaking to us, she spoke a more intelligible language than when alone.

"Yes; but this child has been lost—lost out of doors! Have you seen or heard anything of one?"

"I've not been in the way o' seeing or hearing, master; I've been in the tent alone. If folks had come to my aid, Corry might not have died. I've had nothing but water to put in her lips all day!"

"What was the matter with her?" Tod asked, convinced at length that Lena was not there.

"She have been ailing long—worse since the moon come in. The sickness took her with the summer, and the strength began to go out. Jake have been down, too. He couldn't get out to bring us help, and we have had none."

Jake was the husband, we supposed. The help meant food, or funds to get it with.

"He sat all yesterday cutting skewers, his hands a'most too weak to fashion 'em. Maybe

he'd sell 'em for a few ha'pence, he said; and he went out this morning to try, and bring home a morsel of food."

"Tod," I whispered, "I wish that hard-hearted Molly had ——"

"Hold your tongue, Johnny," he interrupted sharply. "Is Jake your husband?" he asked of the woman.

"He's my husband, and the children's father."

"Jake would not be likely to steal a child, would he?" asked Tod, in a hesitating manner, for him.

She looked up, as if not understanding. "Steal a child, master! What for?"

"I don't know," said Tod. "I thought perhaps he had done it, and had brought the child here."

Another comical stare from the woman. "We couldn't feed these of ours; what should we do with another?"

"Well: Jake called at our house to sell his skewers; and, directly afterwards, we missed my little sister. I have been hunting for her ever since."

"Was the house far from here?"

"A few miles."

"Then he have sunk down of weakness on his way, and can't get back."

Putting her head on her knees, she began to sob and moan. The child—the living one—

began to bawl; one couldn't call it anything else; and pulled at the green rushes.

"He knew Corry was sick and faint when he went out. He'd have got back afore now if his strength hadn't failed him; though, maybe, he didn't think of death. Whist, then, Dor," she added, to the boy.

"Don't cry," said Tod to the little chap, who had got the largest, brightest eyes I ever saw; "that will do no good, you know."

"I want Corry," said he. "Where's Corry gone?"

"She's gone up to God," answered Tod, speaking very gently. "She gone to be a bright angel with Him in heaven."

"Will she fly down to me?" asked Dor, his great eyes shining through their tears on Tod.

"Yes," affirmed Tod, who had a theory of his own on the point, and used to think, when a little boy, that his mother was always near him, one of God's angels keeping him from harm. "And after a while, you know, if you are good, you'll go to Corry, and be an angel, too."

"God bless you, master!" interposed the woman. "He'll think of that always."

"Tod," I said, as we went out of the tent, "I don't think they are people to steal children."

"Who's to know what the man would do?" retorted Tod.

“A man with a dying child at home wouldn’t be likely to harm another.”

Tod did not answer. He stood still a moment, deliberating which way to go. Back to Alcester?—where a conveyance might be found to take us home, for the fatigue was telling on both of us, now that disappointment was prolonged, and I, at least, could hardly put one foot before another. Or down to the high road, and run the chance of some vehicle overtaking us? Or keep on amidst these fields and hedges, which would lead us home by a rather nearer way, but without chance of a lift? Tod made up his mind, and struck down the lane the way we had come. He was on first, and I saw him come to a sudden halt, and turn his head to me.

“Look here, Johnny!”

I looked as well as I could for the night and the trees, and saw something on the ground. A man had sunk down there, seemingly from exhaustion. His face was a tawny white, just like the dead child’s; a stout stick and the bundles of skewers lay beside him.

“Do you see the fellow, Johnny? It is the gipsy.”

“Has he fainted?”

“Fainted, or shamming it. I wonder if there’s any water about?”

But the man opened his eyes; perhaps the sound of voices revived him. After looking at

us a minute or two, he raised himself slowly on his elbow. Tod—the one thought uppermost in his mind—said something about Lena.

“The child’s found, master!”

Tod seemed to give a leap. I know his heart did. “Found!”

“Been safe at home this long while.”

“Who found her?”

“’Twas me, master.”

“Where was she?” asked Tod, his tone softening. “Let us hear about it.”

“I was making back for the town” (we supposed he meant Alcester), “and missed the way; land about here’s strange to me. Agoing through a bit of a grove, which didn’t seem as if it was leading to nowhere, I heard a child crying. There was the little thing tied to a tree, stripped, and ——”

“Stripped!” roared Tod.

“Stripped to the skin, sir, save for a dirty old skirt that was tied round her. A woman carried her off to that spot, she told me, robbed her of her clothes, and left her there. Knowing where she must ha’ been stole from—through you’re accusing *me* of it, master—I untied her to lead her home, but her feet warn’t used to the rough ground, and I made shift to carry her. A matter of two mile it were, and I be not good for much. I left her at home safe, and set off back. That’s all, master.”

“What were you doing here?” asked Tod

as considerately as if he had been speaking to a lord. "Resting?"

"I suppose I fell, master. I don't remember nothing, since I was tramping up the lane, till your voices came. I've had naught inside my lips to-day but a drink o' water."

"Did they give you nothing to eat at the house when you took the child home?"

He shook his head. "I saw the woman again, nobody else. She heard what I had to say about the child, and she never said 'Thank ye.'"

The man had been getting on his feet, and caught up the skewers, that were all tied together with string, and the stick. But he reeled as he stood, and would have fallen again but for Tod. Tod gave him his arm.

"We are in for it, Johnny," said he aside to me. "Pity but I could be put in a picture—the Samaritan helping the destitute!"

"I'd not accept of ye, sir, but that I have a child sick at home, and want to get to her. There's a piece of bread in my pocket that was give me at a cottage to-day."

"Is your child sure to get well?" asked Tod, after a pause; wondering whether he could say anything of what had occurred, so as to break the news.

The man gazed right away into the distance, as if searching for an answer in the far-off star shining there.

"There's been a death-look in her face this day and night past, master. But the Lord's good to us all."

"And sometimes, when He takes children, it is done in mercy," said Tod. "Heaven is a better place than this."

"Ay," rejoined the man, who was leaning heavily on Tod, and could never have got home without him, unless he had crawled on hands and knees. "I've been sickly on and off for this year past; worse lately; and I've thought at times that if my own turn was coming, I'd be glad to see my children gone afore me."

"Oh, Tod!" I whispered, in a burst of repentance, "how could we have been so hard with this poor fellow, and roughly accused him of stealing Lena?" But Tod only gave me a knock with his elbow.

"I fancy it must be pleasant to think of a little child being an angel in heaven—a child that we have loved," said Tod.

"Ay, ay," said the man.

Tod had no courage to say more. He was not a parson. Presently he asked the man what tribe he belonged to—being a gipsy.

"I'm not a gipsy, master. Never was one yet. I and my wife are dark-complexioned by nature; living in the open air has made us darker; but I'm English born; Christian, too. My wife's Irish: but they do say she comes of a gipsy tribe. We used to have a cart, and

went about the country with crockery ; but a year ago, when I got ill and lay in a lodging, the things were seized for rent and debt. Since then it's been hard lines with us. Yonder's my bit of a tent, master, and now I can get on alone. Thanking ye kindly."

"I am sorry I spoke harshly to you, to-day," said Tod. "Take this : it is all I have with me."

"I'll take it, sir, for my child's sake ; it may help to put the strength into her. Otherwise I'd not. We're honest ; we've never begged. Thank ye both, masters, once again."

It was only a shilling or two. Tod spent, and never had much in his pockets. "I wish it had been sovereigns," said he to me ; "but we will do something better for them to-morrow, Johnny. I am sure the Pater will."

"Tod," said I, as we ran on, "had we seen the man close before, and spoken with him, I should never have suspected him. He has a face to be trusted."

Tod burst into a laugh. "There you are, Johnny, at your faces again !"

I was always reading people's faces, and taking likes and dislikes accordingly. They called me a muff for it at home (and for many other things), Tod especially ; but it seemed to me that I could read people as easily as a book. Duffham, our surgeon at Church Dykely, bade me *trust to it* as a good gift from God. One day,

pushing my straw hat up to draw his fingers across the top of my brow, he quaintly told the Squire that when he wanted people's morals read, to come to me to read them. The Squire only laughed in answer.

As luck had it, a gentleman we knew was passing in his dog-cart when we got to the foot of the hill. It was old Pitchley. He drove us home: and I could hardly get down, I was so stiff.

Lena was in bed, safe and sound. No damage, except the fright and the loss of her clothes. From what we could learn, the woman who took her off must have been concealed amidst the ricks; when Tod put her there. Lena said the woman laid hold of her very soon, caught her up, and put her hand over her mouth, to prevent her crying out; she could only give one scream. I ought to have heard it, only Mack was making such an awful row, hammering that iron. How far along fields and byeways the woman carried her, Lena could not be supposed to tell: "Miles!" she said. Then the thief plunged amidst a few trees, took the child's things off, put on an old rag of a petticoat, and tied her loosely to a tree. Lena thought she could have got loose herself, but was too frightened to try; and just then the man, Jake, came up.

"I liked *him*," said Lena. "He carried me all the way home, that my feet should not hurt; but he had to sit down sometimes. He said he

had a poor little girl who was nearly as badly off for clothes as that, but she did not want them now, she was too sick. He said he hoped my papa would find the woman, and put her in prison."

It is what the Squire intended to do, good chance helping him. But he did not reach home till after us, when all was quiet again: which was fortunate.

"I suppose you blame me for this?" cried Tod, to his stepmother.

"No, I don't, Joseph," said Mrs. Todhetley. She called him Joseph nearly always, not liking to abbreviate his name, as some of us did. "It is so very common a thing for the children to be playing in the three-cornered field amidst the ricks; and no suspicion that danger could arise from it having ever been glanced at, I do not think any blame attaches to you."

"I am very sorry now for having done it," said Tod. "I shall never forget the fright to the last hour of my life."

He went straight to Molly, from Mrs. Todhetley, a look on his face that, when seen there, which was rare, the servants did not like. Deference was rendered to Tod in the household. When anything should take off the good old Pater, Tod would be master. What he said to Molly nobody heard; but the woman was banging at the brass things in a tantrum for three days afterwards.

And when we went to see after poor Jake and his people, it was too late. The man, the tent, the living people, and the dead child—all were gone.

II.

FINDING BOTH OF THEM.

WORCESTER Assizes were being held, and Squire Todhetley was on the grand jury. You see, although Dyke Manor was just within the borders of Warwickshire, the greater portion of the Squire's property lay in Worcestershire. This caused him to be summoned to serve. We were often at his house there, Crabb Cot. I forget who was foreman of the jury that time: either Sir John Pakington, or the Honourable Mr. Coventry.

The week was jolly. We put up at the "Star and Garter" when we went to Worcester, which was two or three times a-year; generally at the assizes, or the races, or the quarter sessions; one or other of the busy times.

The Pater would grumble at the bills—and say we boys had no business to be there; but he would take us, if we were at home, for all that. The assizes came on this time the week before our summer holidays were up; the squire wished they had not come on until the week after. Anyway, there we were, in clover; the Squire about to be stewed up in the county

courts all day; I and Tod flying about the town, and doing what we liked.

The judges came in from Oxford on the usual day, Saturday. And, to make plain what I am going to tell about, we must go back to that morning and to Dyke Manor. It was broiling hot weather, and Mrs. Todhetley, Hugh, and Lena, with old Thomas and Hannah, all came on the lawn after breakfast to see us start. The open carriage was at the door, with the fine dark horses. When the Squire did come out, he liked to do things well; and Dwarf Giles, the groom, had gone on to Worcester the preceding day with the two saddle-horses, the Pater's and Tod's. They might have ridden them in this morning, but the Squire chose to have his horses sleek and fresh when attending the high sheriff.

"Shall I drive, sir?" asked Tod.

"No," said the Pater. "These two have queer tempers, and must be handled carefully." He meant the horses, Bob and Blister. Tod looked at me; he thought he could have managed them quite as well as the Pater.

"Papa," cried Lena, as we were driving off, running up in her white pinafore, with her pretty hair flying, "if you can catch that naughty kidnapper at Worcester, you put her in prison."

The Squire nodded emphatically, as much as to say, "Trust me for that." Lena alluded to the woman who had taken her off and stolen her clothes two or three weeks before. Tod said,

afterwards, there must have been some prevision on the child's mind when she said this.

We reached Worcester at twelve. It is a long drive, you know. Lots of country-people had arrived, and the Squire went off with some of them. Tod and I thought we'd order luncheon at the Star—a jolly good one; stewed lampreys, kidneys, and cherry tart; and let it go into the Squire's bill.

I'm afraid I envied Tod. The old days of travelling post were past, when the sheriff's procession would go out to Whittington to meet the judges' carriage. They came now by rail from Oxford, and the sheriff and his attendants received them at the railway station. It was the first time Tod had been allowed to make one of the gentlemen-attendants. The Squire said now he was too young; but he looked big, and tall, and strong. To see him mount his horse and go cantering off with the rest sent me into a state of envy. Tod saw it.

“Don't drop your mouth, Johnny,” said he. “You'll make one of us in another year or two.”

I stood about for half an hour, and the procession came back, passing the Star on its way to the county courts. The bells were ringing, the advance heralds blew their trumpets, and the javelin guard rode at a foot pace, their lances in rest, preceding the high sheriff's grand carriage, with its four prancing horses and their silvered harness. Both the judges had come in,

so we knew that business was over at Oxford ; they sat opposite to the sheriff and his chaplain. I used to wonder whether they travelled all the way in their wigs and gowns, or robed outside Worcester. Squire Todhetley rode in the line next the carriage, with some more old ones of consequence ; Tod on his fine bay was nearly at the tail, and he gave me a nod in passing. The judges were going to open the commission, and Foregate Street was crowded.

The high sheriff that year was a friend of ours, and the Pater had an invitation to the banquet he gave that evening. Tod thought he ought to have been invited too.

“It’s sinfully stingy of him, Johnny. When I am pricked for sheriff—and I suppose my turn will come some time, either for Warwickshire or Worcestershire—I’ll have more young fellows to my dinner than old ones.”

The Squire, knowing nothing of our mid-day luncheon, was surprised that we chose supper at eight instead of dinner at six ; but he told the waiter to give us a good one. We went out while it was getting ready, and walked arm-in-arm through the crowded streets. Worcester is always full on a Saturday evening ; it is market-day there, as everybody knows ; but on Assize Saturday the streets are nearly impassable. Tod, tall and strong, held on his way, and asked leave of none.

“Now, then, you two gents, can’t you go on

proper, and not elbow respectable folks like that?"

"Halloa!" cried Tod, turning at the voice. "Is it you, old Jones?"

Old Jones, the constable of our parish, touched his hat when he saw it was us, and begged pardon. We asked what he was doing at Worcester; but he had only come on his own account. "On the spree," Tod suggested to him.

"Young Mr. Todhetley," cried he—the way he mostly addressed Tod—"I'd not be sure but that woman's took—her that served out little Miss Lena."

"That woman!" said Tod. "Why do you think it?"

Old Jones explained. A woman had been apprehended near Worcester the previous day, on a charge of stripping two little boys of their clothes in Perry Wood. The description given of her answered exactly, old Jones thought, to that given by Lena.

"She stripped 'em to the skin," groaned Jones, drawing a long face as he recited the mishap: "two poor little chaps of three years, they was, living in them cottages under the Wood—not as much as their boots did she leave on 'em. When they got home their folks didn't know 'em; quite naked they was, and bleating with terror, like a brace of shorn sheep."

Tod put on his determined look. "And she is taken, you say, Jones?"

“ She was took yesterday, sir. They had her before the justices this morning, and the little fellows knowed her at once. As the ’sizes was on, leastways as good as on, their worships committed her for trial there and then. Policeman Cripp told me all about it; it was him that took her. She’s in the county gaol.”

We carried the tale to the Pater that night, and he despatched a messenger to Mrs. Todhetley, to say that Lena must be at Worcester on the Monday morning. But there’s something to tell about the Sunday yet.

If you have been in Worcester on Assize Sunday, you know how the cathedral is on that morning crowded. Enough strangers are in the town to fill it: the inhabitants who go to the churches at other times attend it then; and King Mob flocks in to see the show.

Squire Todhetley was put in the stalls; Tod and I scrambled for places on a bench. The alterations in the cathedral (going on for years before that, and going on for years since, and going on still) caused space to be limited, and it was no end of a cram. While people fought for standing-places, the procession was played in to the crash of the organ. The judges came, glorious in their wigs and gowns; the mayor and aldermen were grand as scarlet and gold chains could make them; and there was a large attendance of the clergy in their white robes. The Bishop had come in from Hartlebury, and was on his

throne, and the service began. The Rev. Mr. Wheeler chanted ; the Dean read the lessons. Of course the music was all right ; they put up fine services on Assize Sundays now : and the sheriff's chaplain went up in his black gown to preach the sermon. Three-quarters of an hour, if you'll believe me, before that sermon came to an end !

Ere the organ had well played its Amen to the Bishop's blessing, the crowd began to push out. We pushed with the rest, and took up our places in the long cathedral body to see the procession pass back again. It came winding down between the line of javelin-men. Just as the judges were passing, Tod touched me to look opposite. There stood a young boy in dreadful clothes, patched all over, but otherwise clean : with great dark wondering eyes riveted on the judges, as if they had been peacocks on stilts ; on their wigs, on their solemn countenances, on their held-up scarlet trains.

Where had I seen those eyes, and their brilliant brightness ? Recollection flashed over me before Tod's whisper : " Jake's boy ; the youngster we saw in the tent."

To get across the line was impossible : good manners would not permit it, let alone the javelin-guard. And when the procession had passed, leaving nothing but a crowd of shuffling feet and the dust on the white cathedral floor, the boy was gone.

"I say, Johnny, it is rather odd we should come on those tent-people, just as the woman has turned up," exclaimed Tod, as we got clear of the cathedral.

"But you don't think they can be connected, Tod?"

"Well, no; I suppose not. It's a queer coincidence, though."

This we also carried to the Squire, as we had the other news. He was standing in the Star gateway

"Look here, you boys," said he, after a pause of thought; "keep your eyes open; you may come upon the lad again, or some of his folks. I should like to do something for that poor man; I've wished it ever since he brought home Lena, and that confounded Molly drove him out by way of recompense."

"And if they should be confederates, sir?" suggested Tod.

"Who confederates? What do you mean, Joe?"

"These people and the female-stripper. It seems strange they should both turn up again in the same spot."

The notion took away the Pater's breath. "If I thought that; if I find it is so," he broke forth, "I'll—I'll—transport the lot."

Mrs. Todhetley arrived with Lena on Sunday afternoon. Early on Monday, the Squire and Tod took her to the governor's house at the

county prison, where she was to see the woman, as if accidentally, nothing being said to Lena.

The woman was brought in: a bold jade with a red face: and Lena nearly went into convulsions at the sight of her. There could be no mistake: the woman was the same: and the Pater became redhot with anger; especially to think he could not punish her in Worcester.

As the fly went racing up Salt Lane after the interview, on its way to leave the Squire at the county courts, a lad ran past. It was Jake's boy; the same we had seen in the cathedral. Tod leaped up and called to the driver to stop, but the Pater roared out an order to go on. His appearance at the court could not be delayed, and Tod had to stay with Lena. So the clue was lost again. Tod brought Lena to the Star, and then he and I went to the criminal court, and bribed a fellow for places. Tod said it would be a sin not to hear the kidnapper tried.

It was nearly the first case called on. Some of the lighter cases were taken first, while the grand jury deliberated on their bills for the graver ones. Her name, as given in, was Nancy Cole, and she tried to excite the sympathies of the judge and jury by reciting a whining account of a deserting husband and other ills. The evidence was quite clear. The

two children (little shavers in petticoats) set up a roar in court at sight of the woman, just as Lena had in the governor's house; and a dealer in marine stores produced their clothes, which he had bought of her. Tod whispered to me that he should go about Worcester after this in daily dread of seeing Lena's blue-silk frock and open-worked stockings hanging in a shop window. Some allusion was spoken during the trial to the raid the prisoner had also recently made on the little daughter of Mr. Todhetley, of Dyke Manor, Warwickshire, and of Crabb Cot, Worcestershire, "one of the gentlemen of the grand jury at present sitting in deliberation in an adjoining chamber of the court." But, as the judge said, that could not be received in evidence.

Mrs. Cole brazened it out: the testimony was too strong to attempt denial. "And if she *had* took a few bits o' things, cause she was famishing, she didn't hurt the childern. She'd never hurt a child in her life; couldn't do it. Just conteraity to that; she gave 'em sugar plums—and candy—and a piece of a wig,* she did. What was she to do? Starve? Since her wicked husband, that she hadn't seen for this five year, deserted of her, and her two boys, fine grown lads both of 'em, had been accused of theft and got put away from her, one into prison, t'other into a 'formitory, she

* A sort of plain bun sold in Worcester.

hadn't got no soul to care for her nor help her to a bit o' bread. Life was hard, and times was bad ; and—there it was. No good o' saying more."

"Guilty," said the foreman of the jury, without turning round. "We find the prisoner guilty, my lord."

The judge sentenced her to six months' imprisonment with hard labour. Mrs. Cole brazened it still.

"Thank you," said she to his lordship, dropping a curtsey as they were taking her from the dock ; "and I hope you'll sit there, old gentleman, till I come out."

When the Squire was told of the sentence that evening, he said it was too mild by half, and talked of bringing her also to book at Warwick. But Mrs. Todhetly said, "No ; forgive her." After all, it was but the loss of the clothes.

Nothing whatever had come out during the trial to connect Jake with the woman. She appeared to be a stray waif without friends. "And I watched and listened closely for it, mind you, Johnny," remarked Tod.

It was a day or two after this—I think, on the Wednesday evening. The Squire's grand-jury duties were over, but he stayed on, in-

tending to make a week of it; Mrs. Todhetley and Lena had left for home. We had dined late, and Tod and I went for a stroll afterwards; leaving the Pater, and an old clergyman, who had dined with us, to their wine. In passing the cooked-meat shop in High-street, we saw a little chap looking in, his face flattened against the panes. Tod laid hold of his shoulder, and the boy turned his brilliant eyes and their hungry expression upon us.

"Do you remember me, Dor?" You see, Tod had not forgotten his name.

Dor evidently did remember. And whether it was that he felt frightened at being accosted, or whether the sight of us brought back to him the image of the dead child-sister lying on the rushes, was best known to himself; but he burst out crying.

"There's nothing to cry for," said Tod; "you need not be afraid. Could you eat some of that meat?"

Something like a shiver of glad surprise broke over the boy's face at the question; just as though he had had no food for weeks. Tod gave him a shilling, and told him to go in and buy some. But the boy looked at the money doubtingly.

"A whole shilling! They'd think I stole it."

Tod took back the money, and went in himself. He was as proud a fellow as you'd find in the two counties, and yet he would do all

sorts of things that many another glanced askance at.

"I want half a pound of beef," said he to the man who was carving, "and some bread, if you sell it. And I'll take one of those small pork pies."

"Shall I put the meat in paper, sir?" asked the man: as if doubting whether Tod might prefer to eat it there.

"Yes," said Tod. And the customers, working men, and a woman in a drab shawl, turned and stared at him.

Tod paid; took it all in his hands, and we left the shop. He did not mind to be seen carrying the parcels; but he would have minded letting them know that he was feeding a poor boy.

"Here, Dor, you can take the things now," said he, when we had gone a few yards. "Where do you live?"

Dor explained in a fashion. We knew Worcester well, but failed to understand. "Not far from the big church," he said; and at first we thought he meant the cathedral.

"Never mind," said Tod; "go on, and show us."

He went skimming along, Tod keeping him within arm's length, lest he should try to escape. Why Tod should have suspected he might, I don't know; nothing, as it turned out, could have been farther from Dor's thoughts. The church he spoke of proved to be All Saints';

the boy turned up an entry near to it, and we found ourselves in a regular rookery of dirty, miserable, tumble-down houses. Loose men stood about, pipes in their mouths; women, in tatters, had their hair hanging down.

Dor dived into a dark den that seemed to be reached through a hole you had to stoop under. My patience! what a close place it was, with a smell that nearly knocked you backwards. There was not an earthly thing in the room that we could see, except some straw in a corner, and on that Jake was lying. The boy appeared with a piece of lighted candle, which he had been upstairs to borrow.

Jake was thin enough before; he was a skeleton now. His eyes were sunk, the bones of his thin face stood out, the skin glistening on his shapely nose, his voice was weak and hollow. He knew us, and smiled.

"What's the matter?" asked Tod, speaking gently. "You look very ill."

"I be very ill, master; I've been getting worse ever since."

His history was this. The same night that we had seen the tent at Cookhill, some travelling people of Jake's fraternity happened to encamp close to it for the night. By their help, the dead child was removed as far as Evesham, and there buried. Jake, his wife, and son, went on to Worcester, and there the man was taken worse; they had been in this room

since; the wife had found a place of washing to go to twice a week, earning her food and a shilling each time. It was all they had to depend upon, these two shillings weekly; and the few bits o' things they had, to use Jake's words, had been taken by the landlord for rent. But to see Jake's resignation was something curious.

"He was very good," he said, alluding to the landlord and the seizure; "he left me the straw. When he saw how bad I was, he wouldn't take it. We had been obliged to sell the tent, and there was a'most nothing for him."

"Have you had no medicine? have you had no advice?" cried Tod, speaking as if he had a lump in his throat.

Yes, he had had medicine; the wife went for it to the free place (he meant the dispensary) twice a week, and a young doctor had been to see him.

Dor opened the paper of meat, and showed it to his father. "The gentleman bought it me," he said; "and this, and this. Couldn't you eat some?"

I saw the eager look that arose for a moment to Jake's face at sight of the meat: three slices of nice cold boiled beef, better than what we got at school. Dor held out one in his fingers; the man broke off a morsel, put it into his mouth, and had a choking fit.

"It's of no use, Dor."

“Is his name ‘Dor’?” asked Tod.

“His name is James, sir; same as mine,” answered Jake, panting a little from the exertion of swallowing the meat. “The wife, she has called him ‘Dor’ for ‘dear,’ and I’ve fell into it. She has called me Jake all along.”

Tod felt something ought to be done to help him, but he had no more idea what than the man in the moon. I had less. As Dor piloted us to the open street, we asked him where his mother was. It was one of her working days out, he answered; she was always kept late.

“Could he drink wine, do you think, Dor?”

“The gentleman said he was to have it,” answered Dor, alluding to the doctor.

“How old are you, Dor?”

“I’m a nigh ten.” He did not look it.

“Johnny, I wonder if there’s any place where they sell beef-tea?” cried Tod, as we went up Broad Street. “My goodness! lying there in that state, with no help!”

“I never saw anything so bad before, Tod.”

“Do you know what I kept thinking of all the time? I could not get it out of my head.”

“What?”

“Of Lazarus at the rich man’s gate. Johnny, lad, there seems an awful responsibility lying on some of us.”

To hear Tod say such a thing was stranger than all. He set off running, and burst into our sitting-room in the Star, startling the Pater,

who was alone and reading one of the Worcester papers with his spectacles on. Tod sat down and told him all.

"Dear me! dear me!" cried the Pater, growing red as he listened. "Why, Joe, the poor fellow must be dying!"

"He may not have gone too far for recovery, father," was Tod's answer. "If we had to lie in that close hole, and had nothing to eat or drink, we should probably soon become skeletons also. He may get well yet with proper care and treatment."

"It seems to me that the first thing to do is to get him into the Infirmary," remarked the Pater.

"And it ought to be done early to-morrow morning, sir; if it's too late to-night."

The Pater got up in a bustle, put on his hat, and went out. He was going to his old friend, the great surgeon, Henry Carden. Tod ran after him up Foregate Street, but was sent back to me. We stood at the door of the hotel, and in a few moments saw them coming along, the Pater arm-in-arm with Mr. Carden. He had come out as readily to visit the poor helpless man as he would to visit a rich one. Perhaps more so. They stopped when they saw us, and Mr. Carden asked Tod some of the particulars.

"You can get him admitted to the Infirmary at once, can you not?" said the Pater im-

patiently, who was all on thorns to have something done.

“By what I can gather, it is not a case for the Infirmary,” was the answer of its chief surgeon. “We’ll see.”

Down we went, walking fast : the Pater and Mr. Carden in front, I and Tod at their heels ; and found the room again with some difficulty. The wife was in then, and had made a handful of fire in the grate. What with the smoke, and what with the other agreeable accompaniments, we were nearly stifled.

If ever I wished to be a doctor, it was when I saw Mr. Carden with that poor sick man. He was so gentle with him, so cheery and kind. Had Jake been a duke, I don’t see that he could have been treated differently. There was something superior about the man, too, as though he had seen better days.

“What is your name ?” asked Mr. Carden.

“James Winter, sir, a native of Herefordshire. I was on my way there when I was taken ill in this place.”

“What to do there ? To get work ?”

“No, sir ; to die. It don’t much matter, though ; God’s here as well as there.”

“You are not a gipsy ?”

“Oh dear no, sir. From my dark skin, though, I’ve been taken for one. My wife’s descended from a gipsy tribe.”

“We are thinking of placing you in the In-

firmary, Jake," cried the Pater. "You will have every comfort there, and the best of attendance. This gentleman ——"

"We'll see—we'll see," interposed Mr. Carden, breaking in hastily on the promises. "I am not sure that the Infirmary will do for him."

"It is too late, sir, I think," said Jake, quietly, to Mr. Carden.

Mr. Carden made no reply. He asked the woman if she had such a thing as a tea-cup or wine-glass. She produced a cracked cup with the handle off and a notch in the rim. Mr. Carden poured something into it that he had brought in his pocket, and stooped over the man. Jake began to speak in his faint voice.

"Sir, I'd not seem ungrateful, but I'd like to stay here with the wife and boy to the last. It can't be for long now."

"Drink this; it will do you good," said Mr. Carden, holding the cup to his lips.

"This close place is a change from the tent," I said to the woman, who was stooping over the bit of fire.

Such a look of regret came upon her countenance as she lifted it: just as if the tent had been a palace of gold. "When we got here, master, it was after that two days' rain, and the ground was sopping. It didn't do for *him*"—glancing round at the straw. "He was getting mighty bad then, and we just put our heads into this place—bad luck to us!"

The Squire gave her some silver, and told her to get anything in she thought best. It was too late to do more that night. The church clocks were striking ten as we went out.

“Won’t it do to move him to the Infirmary?” were the Pater’s first words to Mr. Carden.

“Certainly not. The man’s hours are numbered.”

“There is no hope, I suppose?”

“Not the least. He may be said to be dying now.”

No time was lost in the morning. When Squire Todhetley took a will to heart he carried it out, and speedily. A decent room with an airy window was found in the same block of buildings. A bed and other things were put in it; some clothes were redeemed; and by twelve o’clock in the day Jake was comfortably lying there. The Pater seemed to think that this was not enough: he wanted to do more.

“His humanity to my child kept him from seeing the last moments of his,” said he. “The little help we can give him now is no return for that.”

Food and clothes, and a dry, comfortable room, and wine and proper things for Jake—of which he could not swallow much. The woman was not to go out to work again while he lasted, but to stay at home and attend to him.

“I shall be at liberty by the hop-picking

time," she said, with a sigh. Ah, poor creature! long before that.

When Tod and I went in later in the afternoon, she had just given Jake some physic, ordered by Mr. Carden. She and the boy sat by the fire, tea and bread-and-butter on the deal table between them. Jake lay in bed, his head raised on account of his breathing. I thought he was better; but his thin white face, with the dark, earnest, glistening eyes, was almost painful to look upon.

"The reading-gentleman have been in," cried the woman suddenly. "He's coming again, he says, the night or the morning."

Tod looked puzzled, and Jake explained. A good young clergyman, who had found him out a day or two before, had been in each day since with his Bible, to read and pray. "God bless him!" said Jake.

"Why did you go away so suddenly?" Tod asked, alluding to the hasty departure from Cookhill. "My father was intending to do something for you."

"I didn't know that, sir. Many thanks all the same. I'd like to thank *you* too, sir," he went on, after a fit of coughing. "I've wanted to thank you ever since. When you gave me your arm up the lane, and said them pleasant things to me about having a little child in heaven, you knew she was gone."

"Yes."

“ It broke the trouble to me, sir. My wife heard me coughing afar off, and came out o’ the tent. She didn’t say at first what there was in the tent, but began telling how you had been there. It made me know what had happened ; and when she set on a-grieving, I told her not to : Carry was gone up to be an angel in Heaven.”

Tod touched the hand he put out, not speaking.

“ She’s waiting for me, sir,” he continued, in a fainter whisper. “ I’m as sure of it as if I saw her. The little girl I found and carried to the great house has got rich friends and a fine home to shelter her ; mine had none, and so it was for the best that she should go. God has been very good to me. Instead of letting me fret after her, or murmur at lying helpless like this, He only gives me peace.”

“ That man must have had a good mother,” cried out Tod, as we went away down the entry. And I looked up at him, he spoke so queerly.

“ Do you think he will get better, Tod ? He does not seem as bad as he did last night.”

“ Get better ! ” retorted Tod. “ You’ll always be a muff, Johnny. Why, every breath he takes threatens to be his last. He is miles worse than he was when we found him. This is Thursday : I don’t believe he can last out

longer than the week ; and I think Mr. Carden knows it."

He did not last so long. On the Saturday morning, just as we were going to start for home, the wife came to the Star with the news. Jake had died at ten the previous night.

"He went off quiet," said she to the Squire. "I asked if he'd not like a dhrink ; but he wouldn't have it : the good gentleman had been there giving him the bread and wine, and he said he'd take nothing, he thought, after that. 'I'm going, Mary,' he suddenly says to me about ten o'clock, and he called Dor up and shook hands with him, and bade him be good to me, and then he shook hands with me. 'God bless ye both,' says he, 'for Christ sake ; and God bless the friends who have been kind to us !' And with that he died."

That's all, for now. And I hope no one will think I invented the account of Jake's death, for I should not like to do it. The wife related it to us in the exact words written.

"And I able to do so little for him !" broke forth the Squire, suddenly, when we were about half way home ; and he lashed up Bob and Blister regardless of their tempers. Which the animals did not relish.

And so that assize week ended the matter. Bringing imprisonment to the kidnapping woman, and to Jake death.

III.

WOLFE BARRINGTON'S TAMING.

THIS is an incident of our school life; one that I never care to look back upon. All of us have sad remembrances of some kind living in the mind; and we are apt in our painful regret to say, "If I had but done this, or had but done the other, things might have turned out differently."

The school was a large square house, built of rough stone, gardens and playgrounds and fields extending around it. It was called Worcester House: a title of the fancy, I suppose, since it was some miles away from Worcester. The master was Dr. Frost, a tall, stout man, in white frilled shirt, knee-breeches and buckles; stern on occasion, but a gentleman to the back-bone. He had several under masters. Forty boys were received; we wore the college cap and Eton jacket. Mrs. Frost was delicate: and Hall, a sour old woman of fifty, was manager of the eatables.

Tod and I must have been in the school two years, I think, when Archie Hearn entered. He was eleven years old. We had seen him at

the house sometimes before, and liked him. A regular good little fellow was Archie.

Hearn's father was dead. His mother had been a Miss Stockhausen, sister to Mrs. Frost. The Stockhausens had a name in Worcester-shire : chiefly, I think, for dying off. There had been six sisters ; and the only two now left were Mrs. Frost and Mrs. Hearn : the other four quietly decayed away one after another, not living to see thirty. Mr. Hearn died (from an accident) when Archie was only a year old. He left no will, and there ensued a sharp dispute about his property. The Stockhausens said it all belonged to the little son ; the Hearn family considered a portion of it ought to go back to them. The poor widow was the only quiet spirit amidst them, willing to be led either way. What the disputants did was to put it into Chancery : and I don't much think it ever came out again.

It was the worst move they could have made for Mrs. Hearn. For it reduced her to a very slender income indeed, and the world wondered how she got on at all. She lived in a cottage about three miles off the Frosts, with one servant and the little child Archibald. In the course of years people seemed to forget all about the property in Chancery, and to ignore her as quite a poor woman.

Well, we—I and Tod—had been at Dr. Frost's two years or so, when Archibald Hearn

entered the school. He was a slender little lad with bright brown eyes, a delicate face and red cheeks, very sweet tempered and pleasant in manner. At first he used to go home at night, but when the winter weather set in he got a cough, and he then came into the house altogether. Some of the big ones felt sure that old Frost took him for nothing: but as little Hearn was Mrs. Frost's nephew and we liked *her*, no talk was made over it. The lad did not much like coming into the house: we could see that. He seemed always to be hankering after his mother and old Betty the servant. Not in words: but he'd stand with his arms on the play-yard gate, and his eyes gazing out to the quarter where the cottage was; as if he'd like his sight to leap the wood and the two or three miles of distance, and take a look at it. When any of us said to him as a bit of chaff "You are staring after old Betty," he would say Yes, he wished he could see her and his mother; and then tell no end of tales about what Betty had done for him in his illnesses. Any way, Hearn was a straightforward little chap, and a favourite in the school.

He had been with us about a year when Wolfe Barrington came. Quite another sort of pupil. A big strong fellow who had never had a mother: rich and overbearing, and cruel enough. He was in black from head to foot for his father, who had just died: a rich

Irishman, given to company and strong living. Wolfe came in for all the money; so that he had a fine career before him and might be expected to set the world on fire. Little Hearn's stories had been of home; of his mother and old Betty. Wolfe's were different. He had had the run of his father's stables and knew more about horses and dogs than the animals themselves. Curious things, too, he'd tell of men and women, who had stayed at old Barrington's place: and what he said of the public school he had been at might have made old Frost's hair stand on end. Why he quitted the public school we did not find out: some said he had run away from it, and that his father, who'd indulged him awfully, would not send him back to be punished; others said the public masters would not receive him back. In the nick of time the father died; and Wolfe's guardians put him at Dr. Frost's.

"I shall make you my fag," said Barrington, the day he entered, catching hold of little Hearn in the playground, and twisting him round by the arm.

"What's that?" asked Hearn, rubbing his arm—for Wolfe's grasp had not been a light one.

"What's that!" repeated Barrington, scornfully. "What a precious young fool you must be, not to know. Who's your mother?"

"She lives over there," answered Hearn,

taking the question literally, and nodding beyond the wood.

“ Oh ! ” said Barrington, twisting his mouth. What’s her name ? And what’s yours ? ”

“ Mrs. Hearn. Mine’s Archibald. ”

“ Good, Mr. Archibald. You shall be my fag. That is, my servant. And you’ll do every earthly thing that I order you to do. And mind you do it smartly, or may be that girl’s face of yours will show out rather green sometimes. ”

“ I shall not be anybody’s servant, ” returned Archie, in his mild, inoffensive way.

“ Won’t you ! You’ll tell me another tale before this time to-morrow. Did you ever get licked into next week ? ”

The child made no answer. He began to think the new fellow might be in earnest, and gazed up at him in questioning doubt.

“ When your two eyes can’t see out for the swelling round them, and your back’s stiff with smarting and aching—*that’s* the kind of licking I mean, ” went on Barrington. “ Did you ever taste it ? ”

“ No, sir. ”

“ Good again. It will be the sweeter when you do. Now look you here, Mr. Archibald Hearn. I appoint you my fag in ordinary. You’ll fetch and carry for me : you’ll black my boots and brush my clothes ; you’ll sit up to wait on me when I go to bed, and read me to

sleep; you'll be dressed before I am in the morning, and be ready with my clothes and hot water. Never mind whether the rules of the house are against hot water, *you'll have to provide it*, though you boil it on sticks in the bedroom grate, or out in the nearest field. You'll attend me at my lessons; look out words for me; copy my exercises in a fair hand—and if you were old enough to *do* them, you'd have to. That's a few of the items; but there are a hundred other things, that I've not time to detail. If I can get a horse for my use, you'll have to groom him. And if you don't put out your mettle to serve me in all these ways, and don't hold yourself in readiness to fly and obey me at any minute or hour, you'll get one of the lickings I've told you of every day, until you are licked into shape."

Barrington meant what he said. Voice and countenance alike wore a carelessly determined look, as if his words were law. Lots of the fellows, attracted by the talking, had gathered round. Hearn, honest and straightforward himself, did not altogether understand what evil might be in store for him, and grew seriously frightened.

The captain of the school walked up—John Whitney. "What is that you say Hearn has got to do?" he asked.

"*He* knows now," answered Barrington. "That's enough. They don't allow ser-

vants here: I must have a fag in place of one."

In turning his fascinated eyes from Barrington, Hearn saw Blair standing by, our mathematical master—of whom you will hear more later. Blair must have caught what passed: and little Hearn appealed to him.

"Am I obliged to be his fag, sir?"

Mr. Blair put us leisurely aside with his hands, and confronted the new fellow. "Your name is Barrington, I think," he said.

"Yes, it is," said Barrington, staring at him defiantly.

"Allow me to tell you that 'fags' are not permitted here. The system would not be tolerated by Dr. Frost for a moment. Each boy must wait on himself, and be responsible for himself: seniors and juniors alike. You are not at a public school now, Barrington. In a day or two, when you shall have learnt the in-door customs and rules here, I daresay you will find yourself quite sufficiently comfortable, and see that a fag would be an unnecessary appendage."

"Who is that man?" cried Barrington, as Blair turned away.

"Mathematical master. Sees to us out of hours," answered Bill Whitney.

"And what the devil did you mean by making a sneaking appeal to *him*?" continued Barrington, seizing Hearn roughly.

"I did not mean it for sneaking; but I could not do what you wanted," said Hearn. "He had been listening to us."

"I wish to goodness that confounded fool, Taptal, had been sunk in his horse-pond before he put me to such a place as this," cried Barrington passionately. "As to you, you sneaking little devil, it seems I can't make you do what I wanted, fags being forbidden fruit here, but it sha'n't serve you much. There's to begin with."

Hearn got a shake and a kick that sent him flying. Blair was back on the instant.

"Are you a coward, Mr. Barrington?"

"A coward!" retorted Barrington, his eyes flashing. "You had better try whether I am or not."

"It seems to me that you act like one, in attacking a lad so much younger and weaker than yourself. Don't let me have to report you to Dr. Frost the first day of your arrival. Another thing—I must request you to be a little more careful in your language. You have come amidst gentlemen here, not blackguards."

The matter ended at this; but Barrington looked in a frightful rage. It was unfortunate that it should have occurred the day he entered; but it did, word for word, as I have written it. It set some of us rather against Barrington, and it set *him* against Hearn. He didn't "lick

him into next week," but he gave him many a blow that the boy did nothing to deserve.

Barrington won his way, though, as the time went on. He had a large supply of money, and was open-handed with it; and he'd often do a generous turn for one and another. The worst of him was his savage roughness. At play he was always rough; and, when put out, savage as well. His strength and activity were something remarkable; he would not have minded hard blows himself, and he showered them out on others with no more care than if we had been made of pumice-stone.

It was Barrington who introduced the new system at football. We had played it before in a rather mild manner, speaking comparatively, but he soon changed that. Dr. Frost got to know of it in time, and he appeared amongst us one day when we were in the thick of it, and stopped the game with a sweep of his hand. They play it at Rugby now very much as Barrington made us play it then. The Doctor—standing with his face unusually red, and his shirt and necktie unusually white, and his knee-buckles shining—asked whether we were a pack of African cannibals, that we should kick at one another in that dangerous manner. If we ever attempted it again, he said, football should be interdicted.

So we went back to the old way. But we had tried the new, you see: and the conse-

quence was that undue roughness would creep into it now and again. Barrington led it on. No African cannibal (as old Frost put it) could have been more incautiously furious at it than he. To see him with his sallow face in a steam, and his keen black eyes shining, his hat off, and his straight hair flung behind, was not the pleasantest sight to my mind. Snapp said one day that he looked just like the devil at these times. Wolfe Barrington overheard, and kicked him right over the hillock. I don't think he was ill-intentioned; but his powerful frame had been untamed; it required a vent for its superfluous strength: his animal spirits led him away, and he had never been taught to put a curb on himself or his inclinations. One thing was certain—that the name, Wolfe, for such a nature as his, was singularly appropriate. Some of us told him so. He laughed in answer; never saying that it was only so shortened from Wolfrey, which was his real name, as we learnt later. He could be as good a fellow and comrade as any of them when he chose, and on the whole we liked him a great deal better than we had thought we should at first.

As to the animosity against little Hearn, it was wearing off. The lad was too young to retaliate, and Barrington got tired of knocking him about: perhaps a little ashamed of it when there was no return. In a twelvemonth's time it had quite subsided, and, to the surprise of

many of us, Barrington (coming back from a visit to his guardian, old Taptal) brought Hearn a handsome knife of three blades as a present.

And so it would have gone on but for an unfortunate occurrence. I shall always say and think so. But for that, it might have been peace between them to the end and the end. Barrington, who was defiantly independent, had betaken himself to Evesham, one half holiday, without leave. He walked straight into some mischief there, and broke a street boy's head. Dr. Frost was appealed to by the boy's father, and of course there was a row. The Doctor forbade Barrington ever to stir beyond bounds again without first obtaining permission; and Blair had orders that for a fortnight to come Barrington was to be confined to the play ground in after hours.

Very good. A day or two after—on the next Saturday afternoon—the school went to a cricket-match; Doctor, masters, boys, and all; Barrington only being left behind.

Was he one to stand this? No. He coolly walked away to the high road, saw a public conveyance passing, hailed it, mounted it, and was carried to Evesham. There he disported himself for an hour or so, visited the chief fruit and tart shops; and then chartered a gig to bring him back to within half a mile of the school's entrance.

The cricket-match was not over when he got in, for it lasted up to the dark of the summer evening, and nobody would have known of the escapade but for one miserable misfortune—Archie Hearn happened to have gone that afternoon to Evesham with his mother. They were passing along the street, and he saw Barrington amid the sweets.

“There’s Wolfe Barrington!” said Archie, in the surprise of the moment, and would have halted at the tart-shop door; but Mrs. Hearn, who was in a hurry, did not stop. On the Monday, she brought Archie back to school: he had been at home, sick, for more than a week, and knew nothing of Barrington’s punishment. Archie came amidst us at once, but Mrs. Hearn stayed to take tea with her sister and Dr. Frost. Without the slightest intention to create mischief, quite unaware that she was doing it, Mrs. Hearn mentioned incidentally that they had seen one of the boys—Barrington—at Evesham on the Saturday. Dr. Frost pricked up his ears at the news; not believing it, however: but Mrs. Hearn said yes, for Archie had seen him eating tarts at the confectioner’s. The Doctor finished his tea, went to his study, and sent for Barrington. Barrington denied it. He was not in the habit of telling lies, was too fearless of consequences to do anything of the kind; but he denied it now to the Doctor’s face; perhaps he began to think he might have gone a little

too far. Dr. Frost rang the bell and ordered Archie Hearn in.

"Which shop was Barrington in when you saw him on Saturday?" questioned the Doctor.

"The pastry cook's," said Archie, innocently.

"What was he doing?" blandly went on the Doctor.

"Oh! no harm, sir; only eating tarts," Archie hastened to say.

Well—it all came out then, and though Archie was entirely innocent of wilfully telling tales; would have cut out his tongue rather than have said a word to harm Barrington, he got the credit of it now. Barrington took his punishment without a word; the hardest caning old Frost had given for many a long day, and heaps of work besides, and a promise of certain expulsion if he ever went off surreptitiously in coaches and gigs again. But Barrington thrashed Hearn worse when it was over, and branded him with the name of Tell-tale Sneak.

"He will never believe otherwise," said Archie, the tears of pain and mortification running down his cheeks, fresh and delicate as a girl's. "But I'd give the world not to have gone that after noon to Evesham."

A week or two later we went in for a turn at "Hare and Hounds." Barrington's term of punishment was over then. Snapp was the hare; a fleet, wiry fellow who could outrun most of us. But the hare this time came to

grief. After doubling and turning, as Snepp used to like to do, thinking to throw us off the scent, he sprained his foot, trying to leap a hedge and the dry ditch beyond it. We were on his trail, whooping and halloaing like mad ; he kept quiet, and we passed on and never saw him. But there was no more scent to be seen (little pieces of white paper that Snepp had to let fall as he ran), and we found we had lost it, and went back. Snepp showed himself then, and the sport was over for the day. Some went home one way, and some another ; all of us were as hot as Jupiter, and thirsting for water.

“ If you'll turn down here by the great oak tree, we shall come to my mother's house, and you can have as much water as you like,” said little Hearn, in his good-nature.

So we turned down. There were but six or seven of us, for Snepp and his damaged foot made one, and most of them had gone on at a quicker pace. Tod helped Snepp on one side, Barrington on the other ; he limping along between them.

It was a narrow red-brick house, a parlour window on each side the door, and three windows above ; small altogether, but very pretty, with the jessamine and clematis climbing up the walls. Archie Hearn opened the door, and we trooped in, without any regard to ceremony. Mrs. Hearn—she had the same delicate face that Archie had, the same rose-pink colour and

bright brown eyes—came out of the kitchen to stare. As well she might. Her cotton gown-sleeves were turned up to the elbows, her fingers were stained red, and she had a coarse kitchen cloth pinned round her. She was pressing black currants for jelly.

We had plenty of water, and Mrs. Hearn made Snapp sit down, and looked at his foot, and put a wet bandage round, kneeling before him to do it. I thought I had never seen so nice a face as hers; very placid, with a kind of sad look in it. Old Betty, that Hearn used to talk about, appeared in a short blue petticoat and a sort of jacket of brown print. I have seen the homely servants in France, since, dressed very similarly. Snapp thanked Mrs. Hearn for giving his foot relief, and we took off our hats to her as we went away.

The same night, before Blair called us in for prayers, Archie Hearn heard Barrington giving a sneering account of the visit to some of the fellows in the playground.

“Just like a cook, you know. Might be taken for one. Some coarse bunting tied round her middle, and hands steeped in red kitchen stuff.”

“My mother could never be taken for anything but a lady,” spoke up Archie bravely. “A lady may make jelly. A great many ladies prefer to do it themselves.”

“Now you be off,” cried Barrington, turning

on him sharply. "Keep at a distance from your betters."

"There's nobody in the world better than my mother," returned the boy, standing his ground, and flushing a painful flush: for, in truth, the small way they were obliged to live in, through Chancery retaining hold of the property, made a sore place in a corner of Archie's heart." Ask Joseph Todhetley what he thinks of her. Ask John Whitney. *They* recognise her for a lady."

"But then they are gentlemen, themselves."

It was I put in that. I couldn't help having a fling at Barrington. A bit of applause followed, and stung him.

"If you shove in your oar, Johnny Ludlow, or presume to interfere with me, I'll pummel you to powder. There."

Barrington kicked out on all sides of him, sending us back. The bell rang for prayers then, and we had to go in.

The game the next evening was football. We went out to it as soon as tea was over, to the field by the river towards Vale Farm. I can't tell much about its progress, save that the play seemed rougher and louder than usual. Once there was a regular scrimmage: scores of feet kicking out at once; great struggling and pushing and shunting: and when the ball got off, and the tail after it in full hue and cry, one was left behind lying on the ground.

I don't know why I turned my head back ; it was the merest chance that I did turn it : and I saw Tod kneeling on the grass, raising the boy's head.

"Halloa !" said I, running back. "Anything amiss ? Who is it ?"

It was little Hearn. He had his eyes shut. Tod did not speak.

"What's the matter, Tod ? Is he hurt ?"

"Well, I think he's hurt a little," was Tod's answer. "He has had a kick here."

Tod touched the left temple with the point of his finger, drawing the finger down as far as the back of the ear, to indicate the part he meant. It must have been a good wide kick, I thought.

"It has stunned him, poor little fellow. Can you get some water from the river, Johnny ?"

"I could if I had anything to bring it in. It would leak out of my hat long before I got here." For the hat was of straw.

But little Hearn made a move then, and opened his eyes. Presently he sat up, putting his hands to his head. Tod was as tender with him as a mother.

"How do you feel, Archie ?"

"Oh, I'm all right, I think. A bit giddy."

Getting on his feet, he looked from me to Tod in a bewildered manner. I thought it odd. He said he'd not join the game again, but would go in and rest. Tod went with him,

ordering me to keep with the players. Hearn walked all right, and did not seem to be much the worse for it.

"What's the matter now?" asked Mrs. Hall, in her cranky way; for she happened to be in the yard when they entered, Tod marshalling little Hearn by the arm.

"He has had a blow at football," answered Tod. "Here"—showing the place he had shown me.

"A kick, I suppose you mean," said Mother Hall.

"Yes, if you like to call it so. It was a blow with a foot."

"Did you do it, Master Todhetley?"

"No I did not," retorted Tod.

"I wonder the Doctor allows that football to be played!" she went on, grumbling. "I wouldn't, if I kept a school; I know that. It is a barbarous, cruel game, fit only for bears."

"I am all right," put in Hearn. "needn't have come in but for feeling giddy."

But he was not quite right yet. For without the slightest warning, before he had time to stir from where he stood, he became frightfully sick. Hall ran for a basin and some warm water. Tod held his head.

"This is through having gobbled down your tea in such a mortal hurry, to be off to that precious football," decided Hall resentfully. "The wonder is, that the whole crew of you

are not sick, swallowing your food at the rate you do."

"I think I'll lie on the bed for a bit," said Archie, when the sickness had passed. "I shall be up again by supper time."

They went with him to his room. Neither of them had the slightest notion that he was hurt seriously, or that there could be any danger. Archie took off his jacket, and lay down in his other clothes. Mrs. Hall offered to bring him up a cup of tea; but he said it might make him sick again, and he'd rather be quiet. She went down, and Tod sat on the edge of the bed. Archie shut his eyes, and kept still. Tod thought he was dropping off to sleep, and began to creep out of the room. The eyes opened then, and Archie called to him.

"Todhetley?"

"I am here, old fellow. What is it?"

"You'll tell him I forgive him," said Archie, speaking in an earnest whisper. "Tell him I know he didn't think to hurt me."

"Oh, I'll tell him," answered Tod, lightly.

"And be sure give my dear love to mamma."

"So I will."

"And now I'll go to sleep, or I sha'n't be down to supper. You will come and call me if I am not, won't you?"

"All right," said Tod, tucking the counterpane about him. "Are you comfortable, Archie?"

"Quite. Thank you."

Tod came on to the field again, and joined the game. It was a little less rough, and there were no more mishaps. We got home later than usual, and the supper stood on the table.

The suppers at Worcester House were always the same. Bread and cheese. And not too much of it. Half a round off the loaf, with a piece of cheese, for each fellow; and a small drop of beer or water. Our other meals were good and plentiful; but the Doctor waged war with heavy suppers. If old Hall had had her way, we should have had none. Little Hearn did not appear; and Tod, biting at his bread and cheese, went up to look after him. I followed.

Opening the door without noise, we stood listening and looking. Not that there was much good in looking, for the room was in darkness then.

"Archie," whispered Tod.

No answer. No sound.

"Are you asleep, old fellow?"

Not a word still. The dead might be there, for all the sound there was.

"He's asleep, for certain," said Tod, groping his way towards the bed. "So much the better, poor little chap. I'll not wake him."

It was a small room, two beds in it:

Archie's was the one at the end by the wall. Tod groped his way to it: and, in thinking of it afterwards, I wondered that Tod did go up to him. The most natural thing would have been to come away, and shut the door. Unconscious instinct must have guided him—as it guides us all. Tod bent over him, touching his face, I think. I stood close behind. Now that our eyes were accustomed to the darkness, it seemed a bit lighter.

Something like a shout from Tod made me start. It was but a kind of suppressed cry. But in the dark, and holding the breath, one is startled easily.

“Get a light, Johnny. A light!—quick! for the love of heaven.”

I believe I leaped the stairs at a bound. I believe I knocked over Mother Hall at the foot. I know I snatched the candle that was in her hand: and she screamed after me as if I had murdered her.

“Here it is, Tod.”

He was at the door waiting for it, every atom of colour gone clean out of his countenance. Carrying it to the bed, he let its light fall full on Archie Hearn. The face was white and cold; the mouth covered with froth.

“Oh Tod! What is it that's the matter with him?”

“Hush, Johnny! I fear he's dying. Good Lord! to think we should have been such

ignorant fools as to leave him by himself!—as not to have sent for Featherstone!”

We were down again in a moment. Hall stood scolding still at the top of her breath, demanding her candle. Tod said a word that stopped her. She backed against the wall, staring at him.

“Don’t you play your tricks on me, Mr. Todhetley.”

“Go and see,” said Tod.

She took the light from his hand quietly, and went up. Just then, the Doctor and Mrs. Frost, who had been walking all the way home from Sir John Whitney’s, where they had spent the evening, came in; and learnt what had happened.

Featherstone was there in no time, so to say, and shut himself in the bedroom with the Doctor and Mrs. Frost and Hall, and I don’t know how many more. Nothing could be done for Archibald Hearn: he was not quite dead, but close upon it. He was dead before anybody thought of sending to Mrs. Hearn. It came to the same. Had there been telegraph wires to send and bring her upon, she would have come too late.

When I look back upon that evening—and a good many years have gone by since, as if it had been in the beginning of the world—nothing arises in my mind but a picture of confusion, tinged with a feeling of dreadful sorrow;

ay, and of horror. If a death happens in a school, it is generally kept from the pupils, so far as may be; at any rate they are not allowed to see any of the attendant stir and details. But this was different. Upon masters and boys, upon mistress and household, it came with the like startling shock. Dr. Frost said feebly that the boys ought to go up to bed, and then Blair told us to go; but the boys stayed on where they were. Hanging about the passages, stealing up stairs and peeping into the room, questioning Featherstone (when we could get the chance to come upon him), whether Hearn would get well. Nobody checked us.

I went in once. Mrs. Frost was alone, kneeling by the bed; I thought she must have been saying a prayer. Just then she lifted her head to look at him. As I backed away again, she began to speak aloud—and oh! what a sad tone she said it in!

“The only son of his mother, and she was a widow!”

There had to be an inquest. It did not come to much. The most that could be said was, that he died from a kick at football. “A most unfortunate but accidental kick,” quoth the coroner. Tod had said that he saw the kick given: that is, had seen some foot come flat down with a bang on the side of little Hearn’s head; and when Tod was asked if he recognized the foot, he replied No: for boots

looked much alike, and a vast many were thrust out in the scrimmage, all kicking together.

Not one would own to having given it. For the matter of that, the fellow might not have been conscious of what he did. No end of thoughts glanced towards Barrington: both because he was so ferocious at the game, and that he had a spite against Hearn.

"I never touched him," said Barrington when this leaked out; and his face and voice were fearlessly defiant. "It wasn't me. I never so much as saw that Hearn was down."

And as there were others quite as brutal at football as Barrington, he was believed.

We could not get over it any way. It seemed so dreadful that he should have been left alone to die. Hall was chiefly to blame for that; and it cowed her.

"Look here," said Tod to us, "I have got a message for one of you. Whichever the cap fits may take it to himself. When Hearn was dying he told me to say that he forgave the fellow who kicked him".

This was the evening of the inquest-day. We had all gathered in the porch by the stone bench, and Tod took the opportunity to relate what he had not related before. He repeated every word that Hearn had said.

"Did Hearn know who it was, then?" asked John Whitney.

"I think so."

"Then why didn't you ask him to name?"

"Why didn't I ask him to name!" repeated Tod, in a fume. "Do you suppose I thought he was going to die, Whitney?—or that the kick was to turn out a serious one? Hearn was getting big enough to fight his own battles: and I never thought but he would be up again at supper time."

John Whitney pushed his hair back, in his quiet, thoughtful way, and said no more. He was to die, himself, the following year,—but that has nothing to do with the present matter.

I was standing away at the gate after this, looking at the sunset, when Tod came up and put his arms on the top bar.

"What are you gazing at, Johnny?"

"At the sunset. How red it is! I was thinking that if Hearn's up there now he is better off. It is very beautiful."

"I would not like to have been the one to send him there, though," was Tod's answer. "Johnny, I am certain Hearn knew who it was," he went on in a low tone. "I am certain he thought the fellow, himself, knew, and that it had been done for the purpose. I think I know also."

"Tell us," I said. And Tod glanced over his shoulders, to make sure nobody was within hearing before he replied.

"Wolfe Barrington."

"Why don't you accuse him, Tod?"

"It wouldn't do. And I am not absolutely sure. What I saw, was this. In the rush, one of them fell: I saw his head lying on the ground sideways. Before I could shout out to the fellows to take care, a boot with a grey trouser over it came stamping down (not kicking) on the side of the head. If ever anything was done deliberately, that stamp seemed to be; it could hardly have been accidental. I know no more than that: it all passed in a moment of time. I didn't *see* that it was Barrington. But—what other fellow is there among us who would have wilfully harmed little Hearn? It is that thought that brings me conviction."

I looked round to where a lot of them stood at a distance. "Wolfe has got 'on grey trousers, too."

"That does not tell much," returned Tod. "Half of us wear the same. Yours are grey; mine are grey. It's just this: While I am convinced in my own mind that it was Barrington, there's no sort of proof that it was, and he denies it. So it must rest, and die away. Keep counsel, Johnny."

The funeral took place from the school. All of us went to it. In the evening, Mrs. Hearn, who had been staying at the house, surprised us by coming into the tea-room. She looked very small in her black gown. Her thin cheeks were more flushed than usual, and her eyes had a mournful sadness in them.

"I wish to say good-bye to you ; and to shake hands with you before I go home," she began, in a kind tone, and we all got up from the table to face her.

"I thought you would like me to tell you that I feel sure it must have been an accident ; that no harm was intended. My dear little son said this to Joseph Todhetley when he was dying—and I fancy that some prevision of death must have lain then upon his spirit and caused him to say it, though he himself might not have been quite conscious of it. He died in love and peace with all ; and, if he had anything to forgive—he forgave freely. I wish to let you know that I do the same. Only try to be a little less rough at play—and God bless you all. Will you shake hands with me ?"

John Whitney, a true gentleman always, went up to her first, meeting her offered hand.

"If it had been anything but an accident, Mrs. Hearn," he began in a tone of deep feeling, "if any one of us had done it wilfully, I think, standing to hear you now, we should shrink to the earth in our shame and contrition. You cannot regret Archibald much more than we do."

"In the midst of my grief, I know one thing : that God has taken him from a world of care to peace and happiness ; I try to *rest* in that. Thank you all. Good-bye."

Catching up her breath, she shook hands with

us one by one, giving each a smile ; but did not say more.

And the only one of us who did not feel her visit as it was meant, was Barrington. But he had no feeling : his body was too strong for it, his temper too fierce. He would have thrown a sneer of ridicule after her, but Whitney hissed it down.

Before another day had gone over, Barrington and Tod had a row. It was about a crib. Tod could be as overbearing as Barrington when he pleased, and he was cherishing a bad feeling towards him. They went and had it out in private—but it did not come to a fight. Tod was not one to keep in matters till they rankled, and he openly told Barrington that he believed it was he who had caused Hearn's death. Barrington denied it out-and-out ; first of all swearing passionately that he had not, and then calming down to talk about it quietly. Tod felt less sure of it after that : as he confided to me in the bed-room.

Dr. Frost forbid football. And the time went on.

What I have to relate further may be thought a made-up story, such as we read in fiction. It is so very like a case of retribution. But it is all true, and happened as I shall put it. And somehow I never care to dwell long upon the calamity.

It was as nearly as possible a year after Hearn died. Jessup was captain of the school, for John Whitney was too ill to come. Jessup was nearly as rebellious as Wolfe; and the two would ridicule Blair audaciously, and call him "Baked pie" to his face. One morning, when they had given no end of trouble to old Frost over their Greek, and laid the blame upon the hot weather, the Doctor said he had a great mind to keep them in till dinner-time. However, they eat humble-pie, and were allowed to escape. Blair was taking us for a walk. Instead of keeping with the ranks, Barrington and Jessup fell out, and sat down on the gate of a field, where the wheat was being carried. Blair said they might sit there if they pleased, but forbid them to cross the gate. Indeed, there was a general and standing interdiction against our entering any field while the crops were being gathered. We went on and left them.

Half an hour afterwards, before we got back, Barrington had been carried home, dying.

Dying, as was supposed. He and Jessup had disobeyed Blair, disregarded orders, and rushed into the field, shouting and leaping like two mad fellows—as the labourers said afterwards. Making for the waggon, laden high with wheat, they mounted it, and started on the horses. In some way, Barrington lost his balance, slipped over the side and the hind wheel went over him.

I shall never forget the house when we got home. Jessup, in his terror, had made off for his home, running all the way—seven miles. He was in the same boat as Wolfe, except that he escaped injury—had gone over the stile in defiance of orders, and got on the waggon. Barrington was lying in the blue-room; and Mrs. Frost, frightened out of bed, stood on the landing in her night-cap, a shawl wrapped round her loose white dressing-gown. She was ill at the time. Featherstone came striding up the road wiping his hot face.

“Lord bless me!” cried Featherstone when he had looked at Wolfe and touched him. “I can’t deal with this by myself, Dr. Frost.”

The Doctor had guessed that. And Roger was already away on a galloping horse, flying to fetch another. It was little Pink he brought: a shrimp of a man, with a fair reputation in his profession. But the two were more accustomed to treat rustic ailments than grave cases, and Dr. Frost knew that. Evening drew on, and the dusk was gathering, when a carriage with post horses came thundering in at the front gates, bringing Mr. Carden.

They did not explain to us boys the particulars of the injuries; and I don’t know them to this day. The spine was hurt; the right ankle smashed: we heard that much. Taptal, Barrington’s guardian, came over, and an uncle from London. Altogether, it was a miserable

time. The masters seized upon it to be doubly stern, and read us lectures upon disobedience and rebellion—as though we had been the offenders! As to Jessup, his father handed him back again to Dr. Frost, saying that in his opinion a taste of birch would much conduce to his benefit.

Barrington did not seem to suffer as keenly as some might; perhaps his spirits kept him up, for they were untamed. On the very day after the accident, he asked for some of the fellows to go in and sit with him, because he was dull. By-and-by, the doctors said. And the next day but one, Dr. Frost sent in me. Me! The paid nurse sat at the end of the room.

“Oh, it’s you, is it, Ludlow! Where’s Jessup?”

“Jessup’s under punishment.”

His face looked the same as ever, and that was all of him that could be seen. He lay on his back, covered over. As to the low bed, it might have been a board, to judge by the flatness. And perhaps was.

“I’m very sorry about it, Barrington. We all are. Are you in much pain?”

“Oh I don’t know,” was his impatient answer. “One has to grin and bear it. The cursed idiots had stacked the wheat sloping to the sides, or it would never have happened. What do you hear about me?”

“Nothing but regret that it——”

"I don't mean that stuff. Regret, indeed! regret won't undo it. I mean as to my getting about again. Will it be ages first?"

"We don't hear a word."

"If they were to keep me here a month, Ludlow, I should go mad. Rampant. You shut up, old woman."

For the nurse had interfered, telling him he must not excite himself.

"My ankle's hurt; but I believe it is not half so bad as a regular fracture: and my back's bruised. Well, what's a bruise? Nothing. Of course there's pain and stiffness, and all that; but so there is after a bad fight, or a thrashing. And they talk about my lying here for three or four weeks! Catch me."

One thing was evident: that they had not allowed Wolfe to suspect the gravity of the case. Down stairs we had an inkling, I don't remember whence gathered, that it might possibly end in death. There was a suspicion of some injury that we could not get to know of; inward I think; and it is said that even Mr. Carden, with all his surgical skill, could not get to it either. Any way, the prospect of recovery for Barrington was supposed to be of the scantiest; and it put a gloom upon us.

A sad mishap was to occur. Of course nobody in their senses would have let Barrington learn the danger he was in; especially while there was just a chance that the peril would be

surmounted. I read a book lately—I, Johnny Ludlow—where a little child met with an accident ; and the first thing the people around him did, father, doctors, nurses, was to inform him that he would be a cripple for the rest of his days. That was common sense with a vengeance : and about as likely to occur in real life as that I could turn myself into a Dutchman. However, something of the kind did happen in Barrington's case, but through inadvertence. Another uncle came over from Ireland ; an old man ; and in talking with Featherstone spoke out too freely. They were outside Barrington's door, and, besides that, supposed he was asleep. But he had woke then ; and heard more than he ought. That blue-room always seemed to have an echo in it.

“ So it's all up with me, Ludlow ? ”

I was by his bedside when he suddenly said this, in the gathering dusk of the summer's evening. He had been lying quite silent since I entered, and his face had a white, still look on it, never before noticed there.

“ What do you mean, Barrington ? ”

“ None of your shamming here. I know ; and so do you, Johnny Ludlow. I say, though, it makes one feel queer to find the world's slipping away. I had looked for so much jolly *life* in it.”

“ Barrington, you may get well yet ; you may, indeed. Ask Pink and Featherstone, else,

when they next come; ask Mr. Carden. I can't think what idea you have been getting hold of."

"There, that's enough," he answered "Don't bother. I want to be quiet."

He shut his eyes; and the dusk grew greater as the minutes passed. Presently some one came into the room with a gentle step: a lady in a black-and-white gown that didn't rustle. It was Mrs. Hearn. Barrington looked up at her.

"I am going to stay with you for a day or two," she said in a low sweet voice, bending over him and touching his forehead with her cool fingers. "I hear you have taken a dislike to the nurse: and Mrs. Frost is really too weakly just now to get about."

"She's a sly cat," said Barrington, alluding to the nurse: "she watches me out of the tail of her eye. Hall's as bad. They are in league together."

"Well, they shall not come in more than I can help. I will nurse you myself."

"No; not you," said Barrington, his face looking red and uneasy. "I'll not trouble *you*."

She sat down in my chair, just pressing my hand in token of greeting. And I left them.

In the ensuing days his life trembled in the balance: and even when part of the more immediate danger was surmounted, part of the worst of the pain, it was still a toss-up. Bar-

rington had no hope whatever : I don't think Mrs. Hearn had, either.

She hardly left him. At first he seemed to resent her presence ; to wish her away ; to receive what she did for him unwillingly : but, in spite of himself he grew to look round for her, and to let his hand lie in hers whenever she chose to take it.

Who can tell what she said to him ? Who can know how she softly and gradually awoke the good feelings within him, and won his heart from its brazen hardness ? She did do it, and that's enough. The way was paved for her. What the accident had not done, the fear of death had. Tamed him.

One evening when the sun had sunk, leaving only its light fading in the western sky, and Barrington had been watching it from his bed, he suddenly burst into tears. Mrs. Hearn, busy amidst the physic bottles, was by his side in a moment.

“ Wolfe ! ”

“ It's very hard to have to die.”

“ Hush, my dear, you are not worse : a little better. I think you may be spared ; I do indeed. And—in any case—you know what I read to you this evening : that to die is gain.”

“ Yes, for some. I've never had my thoughts turned that way.”

“ They are turned now. That is quite enough.”

"It is such a little while to have lived," went on Barrington, after a pause. "Such a little while to have enjoyed earth. What are my few years compared to the ages that have gone by, to the ages and ages that are to come? Nothing. Not as much as a single drop of water to the wide ocean."

"Wolfe, dear, if you live out the allotted years of man, three score and ten, what would even that be in comparison? As you say—nothing. It seems to me that our well-being or ill-being here need not much concern us: the days, whether short or long, will pass as a dream. Eternal life lasts for ever; soon we must all be departing for it."

Wolfe made no answer. The clear sky was assuming its pale tints, blue, green, orange, shading off one into another, a beautiful opal, and his eyes were looking out at it. But as if he saw nothing.

"Listen, my dear. When Archibald died, *I* thought I should have died; died of grief and aching pain. I grieved to think how short had been his span of life on this fair earth; how cruel his fate in being taken from it so early. But, oh, Wolfe, God has shown me my mistake. I would not have him back if I could."

Wolfe put up his hand to cover his face. Not a word spoke he.

"I wish you could see things as I see them,

now that they have been cleared for me," she resumed. "It is so much better to be in heaven than on earth. We, who are here, have to battle with many cares and crosses; and shall have to the end. Archie has thrown all care off. He is in happiness amidst the redeemed."

The room was getting darker; the sky's opal tints came out brighter. Wolfe's face was one of intense pain.

"Wolfe, dear, do not mistake me; do not think me hard if I say that you would be happier there than here. There is nothing to dread, dying in Christ. Believe me, I would not for the world have Archie back again: how could I then make sure what the eventual ending would be? You and he will know each other up there."

"Don't," said Wolfe.

"Don't what?"

Wolfe pulled her hand close to his face, and she knelt down to catch his whisper.

"I killed him."

A pause: and a kind of sob in her throat. Then, drawing away her hand, she laid her cheek to his.

"My dear, I think I have known it."

"You—have—known—it?" stammered disbelieving Wolfe.

"Yes. I thought it was likely. I felt nearly sure. Don't let it trouble you now. Archie

forgave, you know, and I forgave: and God will forgive."

"How could you come here to nurse me—knowing that?"

"It made me the more anxious to come. You have no mother."

"No." Wolfe was sobbing bitterly. "She died when I was born. I've never had anybody. I've never had a chapter read to me, or a prayer prayed."

"No, no, dear. And Archie—oh, Archie had all that. From the time he could speak, I tried to train him for heaven. It has seemed to me, since, just as though I had foreseen he would go early, and was preparing him for it."

"I never meant to kill him," sobbed Wolfe. "I saw his head down there, and I sent my foot upon it without a moment's thought. If I had taken thought, or known it would hurt him seriously, I'd not have done it."

"He is better off, dear," was all she said. "You have that comfort."

"Any way, I am paid out for it. At the best, I suppose I shall go upon crutches for life. That's bad enough: but dying's worse. Mrs. Hearn, I am not ready to die."

"Be you very sure God will not take you until you are ready, if you only wish and hope to be made so from your very heart," she whispered. "I am praying to Him often for you, Wolfe."

"I think you must be one of heaven's angels," said Wolfe, with a burst of emotion.

"No, dear ; only a weak woman. I have had so much sorrow and care, trial upon trial, one disappointment after another, that it has left me nothing but heaven to lean upon. Wolfe, I am trying to show you a little bit of the way thither : and I think—I do indeed—that this accident, which seems, and is, so dreadful, may have been sent by God in mercy. Perhaps, else, you might never have found Him : and where would you have been in all that long, long eternity that has to come ? A few years here : millions of never ending ages hereafter ! —oh, Wolfe ! bear up bravely for the little span, even though the cross may be heavy. Fight on manfully for the real life."

"If you will help me."

"To be sure I will."

Wolfe got about again, and came out upon crutches. After awhile they were discarded, first one, then the other, and he took to a stick permanently. He would never go without that. He would never run or leap again, or kick much either. The doctors looked upon it as a wonderful cure—and old Featherstone was apt to talk to us boys as if it were he who had pulled him through. But not in Henry Carden's hearing.

The uncles and Taptal said he would be better now at a private tutor's. But Wolfe would not leave Dr. Frost's. A low pony carriage was bought for him, and all his spare time he would go driving over to Mrs. Hearn's. He was as a son to her. His great animal spirits had been taken out of him, you see; and he had to find his happiness in quieter grooves. One Saturday afternoon he drove me over. Mrs. Hearn had asked me to stay with her until the Monday morning. Barrington generally stayed.

It was in November. Considerably more than a year after the accident. The guns of the sportsmen were heard in the wood; a pack of hounds and their huntsmen rode past the cottage at a gallop, in full chase after a late find. Barrington looked and listened, a sigh escaping him.

"These pleasures are barred to me now."

"But a better one has been opened to you," said Mrs. Hearn, with a meaning smile, as she took his hand to hold.

And on Wolfe's face, when he glanced at her in answer, there sat a look of satisfied rest, that I am sure had never been seen on it before he fell off the waggon.

IV.

MAJOR PARRIFER.

HE was one of the worst magistrates that ever sat upon the bench of justices. Strangers were given to wonder how he got his commission. But, you see, men are fit or unfit for a post according to their doings in it ; and, generally speaking, people cannot tell what the doings will be beforehand.

They called him Major : Major Parrifer : but he only held rank in a militia regiment, and everybody knows what that is. He had bought the place he lived in some years before, and christened it Parrifer Hall. The worst title he could have hit upon ; seeing that the good old Hall, with a good old family in it, was only a mile or two distant. Parrifer Hall was only a stone's throw, so to say, beyond our village, Church Dykely.

They lived at a high rate ; money was not lacking ; the Major, his wife, six daughters, and a son who did not come home much. Mrs. Parrifer was stuck up : it is one of our county sayings, and it applied to her well. When she called on people her silk gowns rustled

as if buckram lined them ; her voice was loud, her manner patronising ; the Major's voice and manner were the same ; and the girls took after them.

Close by, at the corner of Piefinch Lane, was a cottage that belonged to me. To me, Johnny Ludlow. Not that I had control yet awhile over that, or any other cottage I might possess. George Reed rented the cottage. It stood in a good large garden which touched Major Parrifer's side fence. On the other side the garden, a high hedge divided it from the lane : but it had only a low hedge in front, with a low gate in the middle. Well-kept trim hedges : George Reed took care of that.

There was quite a history attaching to him. His father had been indoor servant at the Court ; when he married and left it, my grandfather gave him a lease of this cottage, renewable every seven years. George was the only son, had been very decently educated, but turned out wild when he grew up and got out of everything ; the result was, that he was only a day-labourer, and never likely to be anything else. He took to the cottage after old Reed's death, and worked for Mr. Sterling ; who had the Court now. George Reed was civil in ordinary, but uncommonly independent. His first wife had died, leaving a daughter, Cathy ; later he married again. Reed's wild oats had been sown years ago ; he was thoroughly well-

conducted and industrious now, working in his own garden early and late.

When Cathy's mother died, she was taken to by an aunt, who lived near Worcester. At fifteen she came home again, for the aunt had died. Her ten years' training there had done very little for her, except make her into a pretty girl. Cathy had been trained to idleness, but to very little else. She could sing: self-taught of course; she could embroider handkerchiefs and frills and petticoat-tails; she could write a tolerable letter without many mistakes, and was great at reading, especially when the literature was of the halfpenny kind issued weekly. The acquirements (except the last) were not bad things in themselves, but entirely unsuited to Cathy Reed's condition and her future prospects in life. The best that she could aspire to be, the best her father expected for her, was that of entering on a light respectable service, and later to become, perhaps, a labourer's wife.

The second Mrs. Reed, a quiet kind of young woman, had one little girl only when Cathy came home. She was nearly struck dumb when she found what had been Cathy's acquirements in the way of usefulness; or rather what were her non-acquirements: the facts unfolding themselves by degrees.

"Your father thinks he'd like you to get a service with some of the gentlefolks, Cathy,"

her stepmother said to her. "Perhaps at the Court, if they could make room for you; or over at Squire Todhetley's. Meanwhile you'll help me with the work at home for a few weeks first; won't you, dear? When another little one comes, there'll be a good deal on my hands."

"Oh, I'll help," answered Cathy, who was a good-natured, ready-speaking girl.

"That's right. Can you wash?"

"No," said Cathy, with a very decisive shake of the head.

"Not wash?"

"Oh dear, no."

"Can you iron?"

"Pocket-handkerchiefs."

"Your aunt was a seamstress: can you sew well?"

"I don't like sewing."

Mrs. Reed looked at her, but said no more then, rather leaving it to practice instead of theory to develop Cathy's capabilities. But when she came to put her to the test, she found Cathy could not, or would not, do any kind of useful work whatever. Cathy could not wash, or iron, or scour, or cook, or sweep; or even sew coarse plain things, such as are required in labourers' families. Cathy could do several kinds of fancy work. Cathy could idle away her time at the glass, oiling her hair, and dressing herself to the best advantage; Cathy had a smattering of history and geo-

graphy and chronology ; and of polite literature, as comprised in the pages of the aforesaid halfpenny and penny weekly romances. The aunt had sent Cathy to a cheap day-school where such learning was supposed to be taught : had let her run about when she ought to have been cooking and washing ; and of course Cathy had acquired a distaste for work. Mrs. Reed sat down aghast, her hands falling helpless on her lap, and a kind of fear at what might be Cathy's future stealing into her heart.

“ Child, what is to become of you ? ”

Cathy had no qualms upon the point herself. She gave a laughing kiss to the little child, toddling round the room by the chairs, and took out of her pocket one of those halfpenny serials, whose enthrilling stories of brigands and captive damsels she had learnt to take her chief delight in.

“ I shall have to teach her everything,” sighed disappointed Mrs. Reed. “ Catherine, I don't think the kind of useless things your aunt has let you learn are good for poorfolk like us.”

Good ! Mrs. Reed might have gone a little farther. She began her instruction, but Cathy would not learn. Cathy was good-humoured always ; but of work she would do none. If she attempted it, Mrs. Reed had to do it over again.

“ Where on earth will the gentlefolks get their servants from, if the girls are to be like you ? ” cried honest Mrs. Reed.

Well, time went on ; a year or two. Cathy Reed tried two or three services, but did not keep them. Young Mrs. Sterling at the Court at length took her. In three months Cathy was back home as usual. "I do not think Catherine will be kept anywhere," Mrs. Sterling said to her stepmother. "When she ought to have been minding the baby, the nurse would find her with a strip of embroidery in her hand, or else buried in the pages of some bad story that can only do her harm."

Cathy was turned seventeen when the warfare set in between her father and Major Parrifer. The Major suddenly cast his eyes on the little cottage outside his own land and coveted it. Before this, young Parrifer (a harmless young man with no whiskers, and sandy hair parted down the middle) had struck up an acquaintance with Cathy. When he left Oxford (where he got plucked twice, and at length took his name off the books) he would often be seen leaning over the cottage-gate, talking to Cathy in the garden, with her two little half-sisters that she pretended to mind. There was no harm : but perhaps Major Parrifer feared it might grow into it ; and he badly wanted the plot of ground to be his, that he might pull the cottage down and extend his own boundaries to Piefinch Lane.

One fine day in the holidays, when Tod and I were indoors making flies for fishing, our old

servant, Thomas, appeared, and said that George Reed had come over and wanted to speak to me. Which set us wondering. What could he want with me ?

“ Show him in here,” said Tod.

Reed came in : a tall and powerful man of forty ; with dark curling hair, and a determined, good-looking face. He began saying that he had heard Major Parrifer was after his cottage, wanting to buy it ; so he had come over to beg me to interfere and stop the sale.

“ Why, Reed, what can I do ? ” I asked.
“ You know I have no power.”

“ You’d not turn me out of it yourself, I know, sir.”

“ That I’d not.”

Neither would I. I liked George Reed. And I remembered that he used to have me in his arms sometimes when I was a little fellow at the Court. Once he carried me to my mother’s grave in the churchyard, and told me she had gone to live in heaven.

“ When a rich gentleman sets his mind on a poor man’s bit of a cottage, and says, ‘ That shall be mine,’ the poor man has not got much chance against him, sir, unless he that owns the cottage will be his friend. I know you have got no power at present, Master Johnny ; but if you’d speak to Mr. Brandon, perhaps he would listen to you.”

“ Sit down, Reed,” interrupted Tod, putting

his catgut out of hand. "I thought you had the cottage on a lease."

"And so I have, sir. But the lease will be out at Michaelmas next, and Mr. Brandon can turn me from it if he likes. My father and mother died there, sir; my wife died there; my children were born there; and the place is as much like my homestead as if it was my own."

"How do you know old Parrifer wants it?" continued Tod.

"I have heard it from a sure source. I've heard, too, that his lawyer and Mr. Brandon's lawyer have settled the matter between their two selves, and don't intend to let me as much as know I'm to go out till the time has come, for fear I should make a row over it. Nobody upon earth can stop it except Mr. Brandon," added Reed with energy.

"Have you spoken to Mr. Brandon, Reed?"

"No, sir. I was going up to him; but the thought took me that I'd better come off at once to Master Ludlow; his word might be of more avail than mine. There's no time to be lost. If once the lawyers get Mr. Brandon's consent, he may not be able to recal it."

"What does Parrifer want with the cottage?"

"I fancy he covets the bit of garden, sir; he sees the good order I've brought it into. If it's not that, I don't know what it can be. The cottage can be no eyesore to him; he can't see it from his windows."

“ Shall I go with you, Johnny ? ” said Tod, as Reed went home, after drinking the ale old Thomas gave him. “ We will circumvent that Parrifer, if there’s law or justice in the Brandon land.”

We went off to Mr. Brandon’s in the pony-carriage, Tod driving. He lived near Alcester, and had the management of my property while I was a minor. As we went along who should ride past, meeting us, but Major Parrifer.

“ Looking like the bull-dog that he is,” cried Tod, who could not bear the man. “ Johnny, what will you lay that he has not been to Mr. Brandon’s ? The negotiations are becoming intricate.”

Tod did not go in. On second thought, he said, it might be better to leave it to me. The Squire must try, if I failed. Mr. Brandon was at home ; and Tod drove on into Alcester by way of passing the time.

“ But I don’t think you can see him,” said the housekeeper when she came to me in the drawing-room. “ This is one of his bad days. A gentleman called just now, and I went in to the master, but it was of no use.”

“ I know ; it was Major Parrifer. We thought he might have been calling here.”

Mr. Brandon was little and thin, with a shrivelled face. He lived alone, except for three or four servants, and always fancied himself ill with one ailment or another. When I

went in, for he said he'd see me, he was sitting in an easy chair, with a geranium-coloured Turkish cap on his head, and two bottles of medicine at his elbow.

"Well, Johnny, an invalid as usual, you see. And what is it you so particularly want?"

"I want to ask you a favour, Mr. Brandon, if you'll please to grant it me."

"What is it?"

"You know that cottage, sir, at the corner of Piefinch Lane. George Reed's."

"Well?"

"I am come to ask you to please not to let it be sold."

"Who wants to sell it?" asked he, after a pause.

"Major Parrifer wants to buy it; and to turn out Reed. The lawyers are going to arrange it."

Mr. Brandon pushed the Turkish cap up on his brow and gave the purple tassel over his ear a twirl as he looked at me. People thought him incapable; but it was only because he had no work to do that he seemed so. He would get a bit irritable sometimes; very rarely, though; and he had a squeaky voice: but he was a good and just man.

"How did you hear this, Johnny?"

I told him all about it. What Reed had said, and of our having met the Major on horseback as we drove along.

"He came here, but I did not feel well enough to see him," said Mr. Brandon. "Johnny, you know that I stand in place of your father, as regards your property ; to do the best I can with it."

"Yes, sir. And I am sure you do it."

"If Major Parrifer—I don't like the man," broke off Mr. Brandon, "but that's neither here nor there. At the last magistrates' meeting I attended he was so overbearing as to shut us all up. My nerves were unstrung for four-and-twenty hours afterwards."

"And Squire Todhetley came home swearing," I could not help putting in.

"Ah," said Mr. Brandon. "Yes ; some people can throw bile off in that way. I can't. But, Johnny, all that goes for nothing, in regard to the matter in hand : and I was about to point out to you that if Major Parrifer has set his mind upon buying Reed's cottage and the bit of land attached to it, he is no doubt prepared to offer a large price ; more, probably, than it is worth. If so, I should not, in your interests, be justified in refusing this."

I could feel my face flush with the sense of injustice, and the tears come into my eyes. They called me a muff for many things.

"I would not touch the money myself, sir. And if you used it for me, I'm sure it would never bring any good."

"What's that, Johnny ?"

“Money got by oppression or injustice never does. There was a fellow at school——”

“Never mind the fellow at school. Go on with your own arguments.”

“To turn Reed out of the place where he has always lived, out of the garden he has done so well by, just because a rich man wants to get it into his possession, would be fearfully unjust, sir. It would be as bad as the story we heard read in church last Sunday, for the First Lesson, of Naboth’s vineyard. Tod said so as we came along.”

“Who’s Tod?”

“Joseph Todhetley. If you turned Reed out, sir, for the sake of benefiting me, I should be ashamed to look people in the face when they talked of it. If you please, sir, I do not think my father would allow it if he were alive. Reed says the place is like his homestead.”

Mr. Brandon measured two tablespoonfuls of medicine into a glass, drank it, and ate a French plum afterwards. The plums were in a paper, and he handed them to me. I ate one, and tried to crack the stone.

“You have taken up a strong opinion upon this matter, Master Johnny.”

“Yes, sir. I like Reed. And if I did not, he has no more right to be turned out of his home than Major Parrifer has out of his. How would *he* like it, if some great rich powerful man came down on his place and turned him out?”

“Major Parrifer can’t be turned out of his, Johnny. It is his own.”

“And Reed’s place is mine, sir—if you’ll not be angry with me for saying it. Please don’t let it be done, Mr. Brandon.”

The pony-carriage came rattling up at this juncture, and we saw Tod look at the windows impatiently. I got up, and Mr. Brandon shook hands with me.

“What you have said is all very good, Johnny, right in principle; but I cannot let it entirely outweigh your interest. When this proposal shall be put before me—as you say it will be—it must have my full consideration.”

I stopped when I got to the door and turned to look at him. If he would but have given me an assurance! He read in my face what I wanted.

“No, Johnny, I can’t do that. You may go home easy for the present, however; for I will promise not to accept the offer to purchase without first seeing you again and showing you my reasons.”

“I may have gone back to school, sir.”

“I tell you I will see you again if I decide to accept the offer,” he repeated emphatically. And I went out to the pony-chaise.

“Old Brandon means to sell,” said Tod when I told him. And he gave the pony an angry cut, that made him fly off with a leap.

Will anybody believe that I never heard

another word upon the subject?—except what people said in the way of gossip. It was soon known that Mr. Brandon had declined to sell the cottage; and when his lawyer wrote him word that the sum, offered for it, was increased to quite an unprecedented amount, considering the small value of the cottage and garden in question, Mr. Brandon only sent a peremptory note back again, saying he was not in the habit of changing his decisions, and the place *was not for sale*. Tod threw up his hat.

“Bravo, old Brandon! I thought he’d not go quite over to the enemy.”

George Reed wanted to thank me for it. One evening, in passing his cottage on my way home from the Court, I leaned over the gate to speak to his little ones. He saw me, and came running out. The rays of the setting sun shone on the children’s white corded bonnets.

“I have to thank you for this, sir. They are going to renew my lease.”

“Are they? All right. But you need not thank me; I know nothing about it.”

George Reed gave a sort of decisive nod. “If you had not got the ear of Mr. Brandon, sir, I know what box I’d have been in now. Look at them girls!”

It was not a very complimentary mode of speech, as applied to the Misses Parrifer. Three of them were passing, dressed outrageously in the fashion as usual. I lifted my straw hat,

and one of them nodded in return, but the other two only looked out at the tail of their eyes.

“The Major has been trying it on with me now,” remarked Reed, watching them out of sight. “When he found he could not buy the place, he thought he’d try and buy out me. He wanted the bit of land for a kitchen-garden, he said; and he’d give me a bank-note of five pounds to go out of it. Much obliged, Major, I said, but I’d not go for fifty.”

“As if he had not got heaps of land himself to make kitchen gardens of!”

“But don’t you see, Master Johnny, to a man like Major Parrifer, who thinks the world was made for him, there’s nothing so mortifying as being balked. He set his mind upon this place; he can’t get it; and he is just boiling over. He’d poison me if he could. Now then, what’s wanted?”

Cathy had come up, with her pretty dark eyes, whispering some question to her father. I ran on; it was getting late, and the Manor ever-so-far off.

From that time the feud grew between Major Parrifer and George Reed. Not openly; not actively. It could not well be either when the relative positions in life were so different. Major Parrifer was a wealthy proprietor, a county magistrate (and an awfully overbearing one); and George Reed was a poor cottager

who worked for his bread as a day-labourer. But that the Major grew to abhor and hate Reed; that the man, inhabiting the place at his very gates in spite of him, and looking at him independently, as if to say he knew it, every time he passed, had become an eyesore; was easy to be seen.

The Major resented it on us all. He was rude to Mr. Brandon when they met; he struck out his whip once when he was on horseback, and I passed him, as if he would like to strike me. I don't know whether he was aware of my visit to Mr. Brandon; but the cottage was mine, I was friendly with Reed, and that was enough. Months, however, went on, and nothing came of it.

One Sunday morning in winter, when our church bells were going for service, Major Parrifer's carriage turned out with the ladies all in full fig. The Major himself turned out after it, walking, one of his daughters with him, a young man who was on a visit there, and a couple of servants. As they passed George Reed's, the sound of work being done in the garden at the back of the cottage caught the Major's quick ears. He turned softly down Piefinch Lane, stole to the high hedge on tiptoe, and stooped to peep through it.

Reed was doing something to his turnips; hoeing them, the Major said. He called the gentleman to him and the two servants, and

bade them look through the hedge. Nothing more. The party came on to church then.

On Tuesday, the Major rode out to take his place on the magisterial bench at Alcester. It was bitterly cold January weather, and only one magistrate besides himself was on it: *a clergyman*. Two or three petty offenders were brought before them, who were severely sentenced—as prisoners always were when Major Parrifer was the presiding judge. Another magistrate came in afterwards.

Singular to say, Tod and I had gone to the town that day about a new saddle for his horse; singular on account of what happened. In saying we were there I am telling the truth; it is not an invented fiction to give colour to the tale. Upon turning out of the saddler's, which is near the justice-room, old Jones the constable was coming along with a handcuffed prisoner, a tail trailing after him.

“Halloa!” cried Tod. “Here’s fun!”

But I had seen what Tod did not, and rubbed my eyes, wondering if they saw double.

“*Tod!* It is George Reed!”

Reed’s face was as white as a sheet, and he walked along, not to say unwillingly, but as one in a state of sad shame, of awful rage. Tod made only one bound to the prisoner; and old Jones, knowing us, did not push him back again.

“As I’m a living man, I do not know what

this is for, or why I am paraded through the town in disgrace," spoke Reed in answer to Tod's question. "If I'm charged with doing wrong, I am willing to appear and answer for it, without being made into a felon in the face and eyes of folks, beforehand."

"Why do you bring Reed up in this manner—with the handcuffs on?" demanded Tod of the constable.

"Because the Major telled me to, young Mr. Todhetley."

Be you very sure Tod pushed after them into the justice-room: the police saw him, but he was a magistrate's son. The crowd would have liked to push in also, but were ignominiously sent to the right-about. I waited, and was presently admitted surreptitiously. Reed was standing before Major Parrifer and the other two, handcuffed still; and I gathered what the charge was.

It was preferred by Major Parrifer, who had his servants there and a gentleman as witnesses. George Reed had been working in his garden on the previous Sunday morning—which was against the law. Old Jones had gone to Mr. Sterling's and taken him on the Major's warrant, as he was thrashing corn.

Reed's answer was to the following effect.

He was *not* working. His wife was ill—her little boy being but four days old—and Dr. Duffham ordered her some mutton broth. He

went to the garden to get the turnips to put in it. It was only on account of her illness that he didn't go to church himself, he and Cathy. They might ask Dr. Duffham.

"Do you dare to tell me you were not hoeing turnips?" cried Major Parrifer.

"I dare to say I was not doing it as work," independently answered the man. "If you looked at me, as you say, major, through the hedge, you must have seen the bunch of turnips I had got up, lying near. I took the hoe in my hand, and I did use it for two or three minutes. Some dead weeds had got thrown along the bed, by the children perhaps, and I pulled them away. I went indoors directly: before the clock struck eleven the turnips were on, boiling with the scrag of mutton. I peeled them and put them in myself."

"I see the bunch of turnips," cried one of the servants. "They was lying——"

"Hold your tongue, sir," roared his master; "if your further evidence is wanted, you'll be asked for it. As to this defence"—and the Major turned to his brother magistrates with a scornful smile—"it is quite ingenious; one of the clever excuses we usually get here. But it will not serve your turn, George Reed. When the sanctity of the Sabbath is violated——"

"Reed is not a man to say he did not do a thing if he did," interrupted Tod.

The Major glared at him for an instant, and

then put out of hand a big gold pencil he was waving majestically.

"Clear the room of spectators," said he to the policemen.

Which was all Tod got for interfering. We had to go out: and in a minute or two Reed came out also, handcuffed as before; not in charge of old Jones, but of the county police. He had been sentenced to a month's imprisonment. Major Parrifer had wanted to make it threemonths; he said something about six; but the other two thought they saw some slightly extenuating circumstances in the case. A solicitor who was intimate with the Sterlings, and knew Reed very well, had been present towards the end.

"Could you not have spoken in my defence, sir?" asked Reed, as he passed this gentleman in coming out.

"I would had I been able. But you see, my man, when the law gets broken——"

"The devil take the law," said Reed savagely. "What I want is justice."

"And the administrators of it are determined to uphold it, what can be said?" went on the solicitor equably, as if there had been no interruption.

"You would make out that I broke the law, just doing what I did; and I swear it was no more? That I can be legally punished for it?"

"Don't, Reed; it's of no use. The Major

and his witnesses swore you were at work. And it appears you were."

"I asked them to take a fine—if I must be punished. I might have found friends to advance it for me."

"Just so. And for that reason of course they did not take it," said the candid lawyer.

"What is my wife to do while I am in prison? And the children? I may come out to find them starved. A month's long enough to starve them in such weather as this."

Reed was allowed time for no more. He would not have been allowed that, but for having been jammed by the crowd at the doorway. He caught my eye as they were getting clear.

"Master Johnny, will you go to the Court for me—your own place, sir—and tell the master that I swear I am innocent? Perhaps he'll let a few shillings go to the wife weekly; tell him with my duty that I'll work it out as soon as I'm released. All this is done out of revenge, sir, because Major Parrifer couldn't get me from my cottage. May the Lord repay him!"

It caused a commotion, I can tell you, this imprisonment of Reed; the place was ringing with it between the Court and Dyke Manor. Our two houses seemed to have more to do with it than other people's; first because Reed worked at the Court; secondly, because I, who owned both the Court and the cottage, lived at the Manor. People took it up pretty warmly,

and Mrs. Reed and the children were cared for. Mr. Sterling paid her five shillings a week ; and Mr. Brandon and the Squire helped her on the quiet, and there were others. In small country localities gentlemen don't like to say openly that their neighbours are in the wrong : at any rate, they rarely *do* anything by way of remedy. Some spoke of an appeal to the Secretary of State, but it came to nothing, and no steps were taken to liberate Reed. Bill Whitney, who was staying a week with us, wrote and told his mother about it ; she sent back a sovereign for Mrs. Reed ; we three took it to her, and went about saying old Parrifer ought to be kicked, which was a relief to our feelings.

But there's something to tell about Cathy. On the day that Reed was taken up, it was not known at his home immediately. The neighbours, aware that the wife was ill, said nothing to her—for old Duffham thought she was going to have a fever, and ordered her to be kept quiet. For one thing, they did not know what there was to tell ; except that Reed had been marched off from his work in handcuffs by Jones the constable. In the evening, when news came of his committal, it was agreed that an excuse should be made to Mrs. Reed that her husband had gone out on a business job for his master ; and that Cathy—who could not fail to hear the truth from one or another—should be warned not to say anything.

"Tell Cathy to come out here," said the women, looking over the gate. It was the little girl they spoke to; who could talk well: and she answered that Cathy was not there. So Ann Perkins, Mrs. Reed's sister, was called out.

"Where's Cathy?" cried they.

Ann Perkins answered in a passion—that she did not know where Cathy was, but should uncommonly like to know, and she only wished she was behind her—keeping her there with her sister when she ought to be at her own home! Then the women told Ann Perkins what they had been intending to tell Cathy, and looked out for the latter.

She did not come back. The night passed, and the next day passed, and Cathy was not seen or heard of. The only person who appeared to have met her was Goody Picker. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon, Tuesday, and Cathy had her best bonnet on. Mother Picker remarked upon her looking so smart, and asked where she was going to. Cathy answered that her uncle (who lived at Evesham) had sent to say she must go over there at once. "But when she came to the two roads, she turned off quite on the conterairy way to Evesham, and I thought the young woman must be daft," concluded Mrs. Picker.

The month passed away, and Reed came out; but Cathy had not returned. He got home on foot, in the afternoon; with his hair cut close,

and seemed as quiet as a lamb. The man had been daunted. It was an awful insult to put upon him ; a slur on his good name for life ; and some of them said George Reed would never hold up his head again. Had he been cruel or vindictive, he might have revenged himself on Major Parrifer, personally, in a manner the Major would have found it difficult to forget.

The wife was about again, but sickly : the little ones did not at first know their father. One of the first people he asked after was Cathy. The girl was not at hand to welcome him, and he took it in the light of a reproach. When men come for the first time out of jail, they are sensitive.

“ Mr. Sterling called in yesterday, George, to say you were to go to your work again as soon as ever you came home,” said the wife, evading the question about Cathy. “ Everybody has been so kind ; they know you didn’t deserve what you got.”

“ Ah,” said Reed, carelessly. “ Where’s Cathy ? ”

* Mrs. Reed felt herself obliged to tell. No diplomatist, she brought out the news abruptly : Cathy had not been seen or heard of since the afternoon he was sent to prison. That aroused Reed : nothing else seemed to have done it : and he got up from his chair.

“ Why, where is she ? What’s become of her ? ”

The neighbours had been indulging in sundry speculations on the same question, which they had obligingly favoured Mrs. Reed with ; but she did not think it necessary to impart them to her husband.

“Cathy was a good girl on the whole, George ; putting aside that she’d do no work, and spent her time reading good-for-nothing books. What I think is this—that she heard of your misfortune after she left, and wouldn’t come home to face it. She is eighteen now, you know.”

“Come home from where ? ”

Mrs. Reed had to tell the whole truth. That Cathy, dressed up in her best things, had left home without saying a word to anybody, stealing out of the house unseen ; she had been met in the road by Mrs. Picker, and told her what has already been said. But the uncle at Evesham had seen nothing of her.

Forgetting his shorn hair—as he would have to forget it, or, at least, to ignore it until it should grow again—George Reed went tramping off, there and then, the nearly two miles of way to Mother Picker’s. She could not tell him much more than he already knew. “Cathy was all in her best, her curls ’iled, and her pink ribbins as fresh as her cheeks, and said in answer to questions that she had been sent for sudden to her uncle’s at Evesham : but she had turned off quite the conterairy road.” From

thence, Reed walked on to his brother's at Evesham ; and learnt that Cathy had not been sent for, and had not come.

When Reed got home, he was dead-beat. How many miles the man had walked that bleak February day, he did not stay to think—perhaps twenty. When excitement buoys up the spirit, the body does not feel fatigue. Mrs. Reed put supper before her husband, and he ate a bit mechanically, lost in thought.

“ It fairly 'mazes me,” he said, presently, in the local phraseology. “ But for going out in her best things, I should think some bad accident had come to her. There's ponds about, and young girls might slip in unawares. But the putting on her best things shows she was going somewhere.”

“ She put 'em on, and went off unseen,” repeated Mrs. Reed, snuffing the candle. “ I should have thought she'd maybe gone off to some wake—only there wasn't one agate within range.”

“ Cathy had no bad acquaintance to lead her astray,” he resumed. “ The girls about here are decent, and mind their work.”

“ Which Cathy didn't,” thought Mrs. Reed. “ Cathy held her head above 'em,” she said, aloud : “ it's my belief she used to fancy herself one o' them fine ladies in her halfpenny books. She didn't seem to make acquaintance with nobody but that young Parrifer. She'd talk to

him by the hour together, and I couldn't get her indoors."

Reed lifted his head. "Young Parrifer! —what—*his* son?" turning his thumb in the direction of Parrifer Hall. "Cathy talked to him?"

"By the hour together," reiterated Mrs. Reed. "He'd be on that side the gate, a-talking, and laughing, and leaning on it; and Cathy, she'd be in the path by the tall hollyhocks, talking back to him, and fondling the children."

Reed rose up, a strange look on his face. "How long was that going on?"

"Ever so long; I can't remember just. But young Parrifer is only at the Hall by fits and starts."

"And you never told me, woman!"

"I thought no harm of it. I don't think harm of it now," emphatically added Mrs. Reed. "The worst of young Parrifer, that I've seen, is that he's as soft as a tomtit."

Reed put on his hat without another word, and walked out. Late as it was, he was going to the Hall. He rang a peal at it, more like a lord, than a labourer just let out of prison. There was some delay in opening the door: the household had gone upstairs: but a man came at last.

"I want to see Major Parrifer."

The words were so authoritative; the man's appearance so strange, with his tall figure

and his clipped hair, as he pushed forward into the hall, that the servant momentarily lost his wits. A light, in a room on the left, guided Reed; he entered it, and found himself face to face with Major Parrifer, who was seated in an easy chair before a good fire, spirits on the table, and a cigar in his mouth. What with the curling smoke from that, what with the faint light—for all the candles had been put out but one—the Major did not at first distinguish his late visitor's face. When the bare head and the resolute eyes met his, he certainly paled a little, and the cigar fell on the carpet.

“I want my daughter, Major Parrifer.”

To hear a demand made for a daughter when the Major had possibly been thinking the demand might be for his life, was undoubtedly a relief. It brought back his courage.

“What do you mean, fellow?” he growled, stamping out the fire of the cigar. “Are you out of your mind?”

“Not quite. You might have driven some men out of theirs, though, by what you've done. *We'll let that part be*, Major. I have come to-night about my daughter. Where is she?”

They stood looking at each other. Reed stood just inside the door, his hat in his hand; he did not forget his good manners even in the presence of his enemy; they were a habit with him. The Major, who had risen in his surprise, stared at him: he really knew nothing what-

ever of the matter, not even that the girl was missing ; and he did think Reed's imprisonment must have turned his brain. Perhaps Reed saw that he was not understood.

"I come home from prison, into which you put me, Major Parrifer, to find my daughter Catherine gone. She went away the day I was taken up. Where she went, or what she's doing, heaven knows ; but you or yours are answerable for it, whichever way it may be."

"You have been drinking," said Major Parrifer.

"*You* have, maybe," returned Reed, glancing at the spirits. "Either Cathy went out on a harmless jaunt, and is staying away because she can't face the shame at home which you have put there ; or else she went out to meet your son, and has been taken away by him. I think it must be the last ; my fears whisper it to me ; and, if so, you can't be off knowing something of it. Major Parrifer, I must have my daughter."

Whether the hint given about his son alarmed the Major, causing him to forget his bluster for once and answer civilly, he certainly did it. His son was in Ireland with his regiment, he said ; had not been at the Hall for weeks and weeks : he could answer for it that Lieutenant Parrifer knew nothing of the girl.

"He was here at Christmas," said George Reed. "I saw him."

“And left two or three days after it. How dare you, fellow, charge him with such a thing? He'd wring your neck for you if he were here.”

“Perhaps I might find cause to wring his first. Major Parrifer, I want my daughter.”

“If you do not get out of my house, I'll have you brought before me to-morrow for trespassing, and give you a second month's imprisonment,” roared the Major, gathering bluster and courage. “You want another month of it: this one does not appear to have done you the good it ought. Now—go!”

“I'll go,” said Reed, who began to see the Major really did not know anything of Cathy—and it had not been very probable that he did. “But I'd like to leave a word behind me. You have succeeded in doing me a great injury, Major Parrifer. You are rich and powerful, I am poor and lowly. You set your mind on my bit of a home, and because you could not drive me from it, you took advantage of your magistrate's post to sentence me to prison, and so be revenged. It has done me a great deal of harm. What good has it done you?”

Major Parrifer could not speak for rage.

“It will come home to you, sir; mark me if it does not. God has seen my trouble, and my wife's trouble, and I don't believe He ever let such a wrong pass by unrewarded. *It will come home to you, Major Parrifer.*”

George Reed went out, quietly shutting the hall-door behind him, and walked home through the thick flakes of snow that had begun to fall.

V.

COMING HOME TO HIM.

THE year was getting on. Summer fruits were ripening. It had been a warm spring, and hot weather was upon us early.

One fine Sunday morning, George Reed came out of his cottage and turned up Piefinch Lane. His little girls were with him, one in either hand, in their clean cotton frocks and pinafores, and straw hats. People had gone into church, and the bells had ceased. Reed had not been constant in attendance since the misfortune in the winter, when Major Parrifer put him into prison. The month's imprisonment had altered him; his daughter Cathy's mysterious absence had altered him more; he seemed not to like to face people, and any trifle was made an excuse to himself to keep away from service. To-day it was afforded by the baby's illness. Reed said to his wife that he would take the little girls out a bit to keep the place quiet.

Rumours were abroad that he had heard once from Cathy; that she told him she should come back some day and surprise him and the neighbours, that she was "all right, and he had

no call to fret after her." Whether this was true, or pure fiction, Reed did not say: he was a closer man than he used to be.

Lifting the children over a stile in Piefinch Lane, just beyond his garden, Reed strolled along the cross path of the field. It brought him to the high hedge that skirted the premises of Major Parrifer. The man had taken it by chance, because it was a quiet walk. He was passing along slowly, the children running about the field, on which the second crop of grass was beginning to grow, when voices on the other side the hedge struck on his ear. Reed gently put some of the foliage aside, and looked through: just as Major Parrifer had looked through the hedge in Piefinch Lane at him, that Sunday morning some few months before.

Major Parrifer had been suffering from a slight temporary indisposition. He did not consider himself sufficiently recovered to attend service, but neither was he ill enough to lie in bed. With the departure of his family for church, the Major had come strolling out in the garden in an airy dressing-gown, and there saw his gardener picking peas.

"Halloa, Hotty! This ought to have been done before."

"Yes, sir, I know it; I'm a little late," answered Hotty; "I shall have done in two or three minutes. The cook makes a fuss if I pick 'em too early; she says they don't eat so well."

The peas were for the delectation of the Major's own palate; so he found no more fault. Hotty went on with his work, and the Major gave a general look round. On a wall near, at right angles with the hedge through which Reed was then peering, some fine apricots were growing, green yet.

"These apricots want thinning, Hotty," observed the Major.

"I have thinned 'em some, sir."

"Not enough. Our apricots were not as fine last year as they ought to have been. I said then they had not had sufficient room to grow. Green apricots are always useful; they make the best tart known."

Major Parrifer walked to the greenhouse, outside which a small basket was hanging, brought it back, and began to pick some of the apricots where they looked too thick. Reed, outside, watched the process—not alone. As luck had it, a man appeared in the field path, who proved to be Gruff Blossom, the Jacobsons' groom, coming home to spend Sunday with his friends. Reed made a sign to Blossom for silence, and caused him to look on also.

With the small basket half full, the Major desisted, thinking possibly he had plucked enough, and turned away carrying it. Hotty came out from the peas then, his task finished. They strolled slowly down the path by the hedge; the Major first, Hotty a step behind,

talking about late and early peas, and whether Prussian blues or marrowfats were the best eating.

“Do you see those weeds in the onion-bed?” suddenly asked the Major, stopping as they were passing it.

Hotty turned his head to look. A few weeds certainly had sprung up. He’d attend to it on the morrow, he told his master; and then said something about the work accumulating almost beyond him, since the under gardener had been at home ill.

“Pick them out now,” said the Major; “there’s not a dozen of them.”

Hotty stooped to do as he was bid. The Major made no more ado but stooped also, he himself uprooting quite half of the weeds. Not much more, in all, than the dozen he had spoken of: and then they went on with their baskets to the house.

Never had George Reed experienced so much gratification since the day he came out of prison. “Did you see the Major at it?—thinning his apricots and pulling up his weeds?” he asked of Gruff Blossom. And Blossom’s reply, gruff as usual, was to ask what might be supposed to ail his eyes that he shouldn’t see it.

“Very good,” said Reed.

One evening in the following week, when we were sitting out on the lawn, the Squire smok-

ing, Mrs. Todhetley nursing her face in her hand, with tooth-ache as usual, Tod teasing Hugh and Lena, and I up in the beech-tree, a horseman rode in. It proved to be Mr. Jacobson. Giles took his horse, and he came and sat down on the bench. The Squire asked him what he'd take, and he chose cider, being thirsty. Which Thomas brought.

"Here's a go," began Mr. Jacobson. "Have you heard what's up?"

"I've not heard anything," answered the Squire.

"Major Parrifer has got a summons served on him for working in his garden on a Sunday, and is to appear before the magistrates at Alcester to-morrow," continued old Jacobson, drinking off a glass of cider at a draught.

"No!" cried Squire Todhetley.

"It's a fact. Blossom, our groom, has also a summons served on him to give evidence."

Mrs. Todhetley lifted her face; Tod left Hugh and Lena to themselves: I slid down from the beech-tree; and we listened for more.

But Mr. Jacobson could not give particulars, or say much else than he had already said. All he knew was, that on Monday morning George Reed had appeared before the magistrates and made a complaint. At first they were unwilling to grant a summons, laughed at it; but Reed, in a burst of reproach, civilly delivered, asked why there should be a law for

the poor and not for the rich, and in what lay the difference between himself and Major Parrifer ; that the one should be called to account and punished for doing wrong, and the other was not even to be accused when he had done it.

“ Brandon happened to be on the Bench,” continued Jacobson. “ He appeared struck with the argument, and signed the summons.”

The Squire nodded.

“ My belief is,” continued old Jacobson, with a wink over the rim of the cider glass, “ that the granting of that summons was as good as a play to Brandon and the rest. I’d as lieve, though, that they’d not brought Blossom into it.”

“ Why ? ” asked Mrs. Todhetley, who had been grieved at the time at the injustice done to Reed.

“ Well, Parrifer is a disagreeable man to offend. And he is sure to visit Blossom’s part in this on me.”

“ Let him,” said Tod, with enthusiasm. “ Well done, George Reed ! ”

Be you very sure we went over to the fight. Squire Todhetley did not appear : at which Tod exploded a little : he only wished *he* was a magistrate, wouldn’t he take his place and judge the Major ! But the Pater said that when people had lived to his age, they liked to be at peace with their neighbours—not but what he

hoped Parrifer would "get it," for having been so cruelly hard upon Reed.

Major Parrifer came driving to the Court-house in his high carriage with a great bluster, and his iron-grey hair sticking up, two grooms attending him. Only the magistrates who had granted the summons sat. The news had gone about like wild-fire, and several of them were in the town and about, but did not take their places. I don't believe there was one would have lifted his finger to save the Major from a month's imprisonment; but they did not care to sentence him to it.

It was a regular battle. Major Parrifer was in an awful passion all the time; asking, when he came in, how they dared summons him. *Him!* Mr. Brandon, cool as a cucumber, answered in his squeaky voice, that when a complaint of breaking the law was preferred before them and sworn to by witnesses, they could only act upon it.

First of all, the Major denied the facts. *He* work in his garden on a Sunday!—the very supposition was preposterous! Upon which George Reed, who was in his best clothes, and looked every bit as good as the Major, and far pleasanter, testified to what he had seen.

Major Parrifer, dancing with temper when he found he had been looked at through the hedge, and that it was Reed who looked, gave

the lie direct. He called his gardener, Richard Hotty, ordering him to testify whether he, the Major, ever worked in his garden, either on Sundays or week-days.

“Hotty was working himself, gentlemen,” interrupted George Reed. “He was picking peas; and he helped to weed the onion-bed. But it was done by his master’s orders, so it would be unjust to seek to punish him.”

The Major turned on Reed as if he would strike him, and demanded of the magistrates why they permitted the fellow to interrupt. They ordered Reed to be quiet, and told Hotty to proceed.

But Hotty was one of those slow men to whom anything like evasion is difficult. His master had thinned the apricot tree that Sunday morning; he had helped to weed the onion-bed; Hotty, conscious of the fact, but not liking to admit it, stammered and stuttered, and made a poor figure of himself. Mr. Brandon thought he would help him out.

“Did you see your master pick the apricots?”

“I see him pick—just a few; green uns,” answered Hotty, shuffling from one leg to the other in his perplexity. “’Twarn’t to be called work, sir.”

“Oh! And did he help you to weed the onion-bed?”

“There warn’t a dozen weeds in it in all, as the Major said to me at the time,” returned

Hotty. "He see 'em, and stooped down on the spur o' the moment, and me too. We had 'em up in a twinkling. 'Twarn't work, sir; couldn't be called it nohow? The Major, he never do work at no time."

Blossom had not arrived, and it was hard to tell how the thing would terminate: the Major had this witness, Hotty, such as he was, protesting that nothing to be called work was done. Reed had no witness, as yet.

"Old Jacobson is keeping Blossom back, Johnny," whispered Tod. "It's a sin and a shame."

"No, he is not," I said. "Look there!"

Blossom was coming in. He had walked over, and not hurried himself. Major Parrifer cast daggers upon him, if looks could do it, but it made no difference to Blossom.

He gave his evidence in his usual surly manner. It was clear and straightforward. Major Parrifer had thinned the apricot tree for its own benefit; and had weeded the onion-bed, Hotty helping at the weeds by order.

"What brought *you* spying at the place, James Blossom?" demanded a lawyer on the Major's behalf.

"Accident," was the short answer.

"Indeed! You didn't go there on purpose, I suppose?—and skulk under the hedge on purpose?—and peer into the Major's garden on purpose?"

“No, I didn’t,” said Blossom. “The field is open to walk in, and I was crossing it on my way to old father’s. George Reed made me a sign afore I came up to him, to look in, as he was doing; and I did so, not knowing what there might be to see. It would be nothing to me if the Major worked in his garden of a Sunday from sunrise to sunset; he’s welcome to do it; but if you summon me here and ask me, did I see him working, I say yes, I did. Why d’you send me a summons if you don’t want me to tell the truth? Let me be, and I’d ha’ said nothing to mortal man.”

Evidently nothing favourable to the defence could be got out of James Blossom. Mr. Brandon began saying to the Major that he feared there was no help for it; they should be obliged to convict him: and he was met by a storm of reproach.

Convict him! roared the Major. For having picked two or three green apricots—and for stooping to pull up a couple or so of worthless weeds? He would be glad to ask which of them, his brother magistrates sitting there, would not pick an apricot, or a peach, or what not, on a Sunday, if he wanted to eat one. The thing was utterly preposterous.

“And what was it *I* did?” demanded George Reed, drowning interfering voices that would have stopped him. “I went to the garden to get up a bunch of turnips for my sick wife, and

seeing some withered weeds flung on the bed I drew them off with the hoe. What was that, I ask? And it was no more. No more, gentlemen, in the sight of heaven."

No particular answer was given to this; perhaps the justices had not any ready. Mr. Brandon was beginning to confer with the other two in an under tone, when Reed spoke again.

"I was dragged up here in handcuffs, and told I had broken the law; Major Parrifer said to me himself that I had violated the sanctity of the Sabbath (those were the words), and therefore I must be punished; there was no help for it. What has he done? I did not do as much as he has."

"Now, you know, Reed, this is irregular," said one of the justices. "You must not interrupt the Court."

"You put me in prison for a month, gentlemen," resumed Reed, paying no attention to the injunction. "They cut my hair close in the prison, and they kept me to hard labour for the month, as if I did not have enough of hard labour out of it. My wife was sick and disabled at the time, my three little children are helpless: it was no thanks to the magistrates, who sentenced me, gentlemen, or to Major Parrifer, that they did not starve."

"Will you be quiet, Reed?"

"If I deserved one month of prison," persisted Reed, fully bent on saying what he had

to say, "Major Parrifer must deserve two months, for his offence is larger than mine. The law is the same for both of us, I suppose. He——"

"Reed, if you say another word, I will order you at once from the room," interrupted Mr. Brandon, his thin voice sharp and determined. "How dare you persist in addressing the Bench when told to be quiet!"

Reed fell back and said no more. He knew that Mr. Brandon had a habit of carrying out his own authority, in spite of his nervous health and querulous way of speaking. The justices spoke a few words together, and then said they found the offence proved, and inflicted a fine on Major Parrifer.

He dashed the money down on the table, in too great a rage to do it politely, and went out to his carriage. No other case was on, that day, and the justices got up and mixed with the crowd. Mr. Brandon, who felt chill in the hottest summer's day, and was afraid of showers, buttoned on a light overcoat.

"Then there are *two* laws, sir?" said Reed to him, quite civilly, but in a voice that everybody might hear. "When the law was made against Sabbath-breaking, those that made it passed one for the rich and another for the poor!"

"Nonsense, Reed."

"Nonsense, sir? I don't see it. I was put

in prison ; Major Parrifer has only got to pay a bit of money, which is of no more account to him than dirt, and that he can't feel the loss of. And my offence—if it was an offence—was less than his."

"Two wrongs don't make a right," said Mr. Brandon, dropping his voice to a low key. "You ought not to have been put in prison, Reed ; had I been on the bench it should not have been done."

"But it was done, sir, and my life got a blight on it. It's on me yet ; will never be lifted off me."

Mr. Brandon smiled one of his quiet smiles, and spoke in a whisper. "He has got it too, Reed, unless I mistake. He'll carry that fine about with him always. Johnny, are you there? Don't go and repeat what you've heard me say."

Mr. Brandon was right. To have been summoned before the bench, where he had pompously sat to summon others, and for working on a Sunday above all things, to have been found guilty and fined, was as the bitterest potion to Major Parrifer. The bench would never be to him the seat it had been ; the remembrance of the day when he was before it would, as Mr. Brandon expressed it, be carried about with him always.

They projected a visit to the sea-side at once. Mrs. Parrifer, with three of the Misses

Parrifer, came dashing up to people's houses in the carriage, finer and louder than ever; she said that she had not been well, and was ordered to Aberystwith for six weeks. The next day they and the Major were off; and heaps of cards were sent round with "P.P.C." in their corner. I think Mr. Brandon must have laughed when he got his.

The winter holidays came round again. We went home for Christmas, as usual, and found George Reed down with some sort of illness. There's an old saying, "When the mind's at ease the body's delicate," but Mr. Duffham always maintained that though that might apply to a short period of time, in the long run mind and body sympathised together. George Reed had been a very healthy man, and as free from care as most people; this last year care and trouble and mortification had lain on his mind, and at the beginning of winter his health broke down. It was quite a triumph (in the matter of opinion) for old Duffham.

The illness began with a cough and a low fever, neither of which can labourers afford time to lie by for. It went on to greater fever, and to inflammation on the chest or lungs, or both. There was no choice then, and Reed took to his bed. For the most part, when our poor people got ill, they had to get well again

without notice being taken of them; but events had drawn attention to Reed, making him into a conspicuous character. His illness was talked of, and so he received help. Ever since the prison affair I had felt sorry for Reed, as had Mrs. Todhetley.

"I have had some nice strong broth made for Reed, Johnny," she said to me one day in January; "it's as good and nourishing as beef-tea. If you want a walk, you might take it to him."

Tod had gone out with the Squire; I felt dull, as I generally did without him, and put on my coat and hat. Mrs. Todhetley had the broth put into a bottle, and brought it me wrapped in paper.

"I would send him a drop of wine as well, Johnny, if you'd take care not to break the bottles, carrying two."

No fear. I put the one bottle to lodge in my breast-pocket, and took the other in my hand. It was a cold afternoon, the sky nearly of a steel-blue, the sun bright, the ground hard. Major Par-rifer and two of his daughters, coming home from a ride, were cantering into the gates as I passed, their groom riding behind. I lifted my hat to the girls, but they only tossed their heads.

Reed was getting over the worst then, and I found him sitting by the kitchen fire, muffled in a bed-rug. Mrs. Reed took the bottles from me in the back'us—as they called the back place where washing and the like was done—for

Reed was sensitive, and did not like things to be sent to him.

"Please God, I shall be at work next week," said Reed, with a groan : and I saw he knew I had brought something.

He had been saying that all along ; four or five weeks now. I sat down opposite to him, and took up the boy, Georgy. The little shaver had come round to me, holding by the chairs.

"It's going to be a hard frost, Reed."

"Is it, sir ? Out-o'-door weather don't seem to be of much odds to me now."

"And a fall o' some sort's not far off, as my wrist tells me," put in Mrs. Reed. Years ago she had broken her wrist, and felt it always on change of weather. "Maybe some snow's coming."

I gave Georgy a biscuit ; the two little girls, who had been standing still against the press, began to come slowly forward. They guessed there was a supply in my pocket. I had dipped my hand into the biscuit-basket at home before coming away. The two put out a hand each without being told, and I dropped a biscuit into them.

It had taken neither time nor noise, and yet there was some one standing inside the door when I looked up again, who must have come in stealthily ; some one in a dark dress, and a black and white plaid shawl. Mrs. Reed looked and the children looked ; and then Reed turned his head to look.

I think I was the first to know her ; she had a thick black veil before her face, and the room was not light. Reed's illness had left him thin, causing his eyes to appear very large : they assumed a sort of frightened stare.

"Father ! you are sick !"

Before he could answer, she ran across the brick floor and had her arms round his neck. Cathy ! The two girls were frightened and flew to their mother ; one began to scream and the other followed suit. Altogether there was noise and commotion ; Georgy, like a brave little man, sucking his biscuit through it all with great composure.

What Reed said or did, I had not noticed ; I think he went to fling Cathy from him—to avoid suffocation perhaps. She burst out laughing in her old light manner, and took something out of the body of her gown, under the shawl.

"No need, father : I am as honest as anybody," said she. "Look at this."

Reed's hand shook so that he could not open the paper, or understand it at first when he had opened it. Cathy flung off her bonnet and caught the children to her. They began to know her then and ceased their cries. Presently Reed held the paper across to me, his hand trembling worse than before, and his face, that illness had left white, turning ghastly with emotion.

"Please read it, sir."

I did not understand it at first either, but the sense came to me soon. It was a certificate of the marriage of Spencer Gervoise Daubeney Parrifer and Catherine Reed. They had been married at Liverpool the very day after Cathy disappeared from home; now just a year ago.

A sound of sobbing broke the stillness. Reed had fallen back in his chair in a sort of hysterical fit. Defiant, hard, strong-minded Reed! But the man was three parts dead from weakness. It lasted but a minute or two; he roused himself as if ashamed, and swallowed down his sobs.

"How came he to marry you, Cathy?"

"Because I would not go with him without it, father. We have been staying in Ireland."

"And be you a repenting of it yet?" asked Mrs. Reed, in an ungracious tone.

"Pretty near," answered Cathy, with candour.

It appeared that Cathy had made her way direct to Liverpool when she left home the previous January, travelling all night. There she met young Parrifer, who had preceded her and made arrangements for the marriage. They were married that day, and afterwards went on to Ireland, where he had to join his regiment.

To hear all this, sounding like a page out of a romance, would be something wonderful for our quiet place when it came to be told. You

meet with marvellous stories in towns now and then, but they are almost unknown with us.

“Where’s your husband?” asked Reed.

Cathy tossed her head. “Ah! Where! That’s what I’ve come home about,” she answered: and it struck me at once that something was wrong.

What occurred next we only learnt from hearsay. I said good-day to them, and came away, thinking to myself it might have been better if Cathy had not married and had not left home. It was a fancy of mine, and I don’t know why it should have come to me, but it proved to be a right one, Cathy put on her bonnet again to go to Parrifer Hall: and the particulars of her visit were known abroad later.

It was getting rather dusk when she approached it; the sun had set, the grey of evening was drawing on. Two of the Misses Parrifer were at the window and saw her coming, but Cathy had her veil down and they did not recognize her. The actions and manners and air of a lady do not come on a sudden to one who has been bred differently; and the Misses Parrifer supposed the visitor to be for the servants.

“Like her impudence!” said Miss Jemima.
“Coming to the front entrance!”

For Cathy, whose year’s experience in Ireland had widely changed her, had no notion of taking up her old position. She meant to

hold her own; and was capable of doing it, not being deficient in the quality just ascribed to her by Miss Jemima Parrifer.

"What next?" cried Miss Jemima, as a ring and a knock resounded through the house, waking up the Major: who had been dozing over the fire amidst his daughters.

The next was that a servant came to the room and told the Major a lady wanted him. She had been shown into the library.

"What name?" asked the Major.

"She didn't give none, sir. I asked, but she said never mind the name."

"Go and ask it again."

The man went and came back. "It is Mrs. Parrifer, sir."

"Mrs. Who?"

"Mrs. Parrifer, sir."

The Major turned and stared at his servant. They had no relatives. Consequently the only Mrs. Parrifer within knowledge was his wife.

Staring at the man would not bring any elucidation. Major Parrifer went to the library, and there saw the lady standing at one side of the fender, holding her foot to the fire. She had her back to him, did not turn, and so the Major went round to the other side of the hearth-rug where he could see her.

"My servant told me a Mrs. Parrifer wanted me. Did he make a mistake in the name?"

"No mistake at all, sir," said Cathy,

throwing up her thick veil, and drawing a step or two back. "I am Mrs. Parrifer."

The Major recognized her then. Cathy Reed! He was a man whose bluster rarely failed, but he had none ready at that moment. Three-parts astounded, various perplexities tied his tongue.

"That is to say, Mrs. Spencer Parrifer," continued Cathy. "And I have come over from Ireland on a mission to you, sir, from your son."

The Major thought that of all the audacious women it had ever been his lot to meet, this one was the worst: at least as much as he could think anything, for his wits were a little confused just then. A moment's pause, and then the storm burst forth.

Cathy was called various agreeable names, and ordered out of the room and the house. The Major put up his hands to "hurrish" her out—as we say in Worcestershire by the cows, though I don't think you would find the word in the dictionary. But Cathy stood her ground. He then went screaming towards the door, calling for the servants to come and put her forth; Cathy, quicker than he, gained it first and turned to face him, her back against it.

"You needn't call me those names, Major Parrifer. Not that I care—as I might if I deserved them. I am your son's wife, and have been such ever since I left father's cottage last

year ; and my baby, your grandson, sir, which it's seven weeks old he is, is now at the Red Lion, a mile off. I've left it there with the landlady."

He could not put her out of the room unless by force ; he looked ready to kick and strike her ; but in the midst of it a horrible dread rose up in his heart that the calm words were true. Perhaps from the hour when Reed had presented himself at the house to ask for his daughter, the evening of the day he was discharged from prison, up to this time, Major Parrifer had never thought of the girl. It had been said in his ears now and again that Reed was grieving for his daughter ; but the matter was altogether too contemptuous for Major Parrifer to take note of. And now to hear that the girl had been with his son all the while, his wife ! But that utter disbelief came to his aid, the Major might have fallen into a fit on the spot. For young Mr. Parrifer had cleverly contrived that neither his father away at home nor his friends near should know anything about Cathy. He had been with his regiment in quarters ; she had lived privately in another part of the town. Mrs. Reed had once called Lieutenant Parrifer as soft as a tom-tit. He was a vast deal softer.

"Woman ! if you do not quit my house, with your shameless lies, you shall be flung out of it."

“I’ll quit it as soon as I have told you what I came over the sea to tell. Please to look at this first, sir?”

Major Parrifer snatched the paper that she held out, carried it to the window, and put his glasses across his nose. It was a copy of the certificate of marriage. His hands shook as he read it, just as Reed’s had shaken a short while before; and he tore it passionately in two.

“It is only the copy,” said Cathy calmly, as she picked up the pieces. “Your son—if he lives—is about to be tried for his life, sir. He is in custody for wilful murder!”

“How dare you!” shrieked Major Parrifer.

“It is what they have charged him with. I have come all the way to tell it you, sir.”

Major Parrifer, brought to his senses by a shock of fright, could but listen. Cathy, her back against the door still, gave him the heads of the story.

Young Parrifer was so soft that he had been made a butt of by sundry of his brother-officers. They might not have tolerated him at all, but for winning his money. He drank, and played cards, and bet upon horses; they encouraged him to drink, and then made him play and bet, and altogether cleared him out: not of brains, he had none to be cleared of: but of money. Ruin stared him in the face: his available cash had been parted with long ago; his com-

mission (it was said) was mortgaged : how many promissory notes, bills, IOU's he had signed, could not even be guessed at. In a quarrel a few nights before, after a public-house supper, when some of them were the worse for drink, young Parrifer, who could go on rare occasions into frightful passions, flung a carving-knife at one of the others, a lieutenant named Cook ; it entered a vital part, and killed him. Mr. Parrifer was arrested by the police at once ; he was in plain clothes, and there was nothing to show that he was an officer. They had to strap him down to carry him to prison : between drink, rage, and fever, he was as a maniac. The next morning he was lying in brain fever, and when Cathy left he had been put into a strait-waistcoat.

She gave the heads of this account in as few words as it is written. Major Parrifer stood like a helpless man. Taking one thing with another, the blow was horrible. Parents don't often see the defects in their own children, especially if they are only sons ; far from having thought his son soft, unfit (as he was nearly) to be trusted about, the Major had been proud of him as his heir, and told the world he was perfection. Soft as young Parrifer was, he had contrived to keep his ill-doings from his father.

Of course it was only natural that the Major's first relief should be abuse of Cathy. He told her all that had happened to his son *she* was

the cause of, and called her a few more genteel names in doing it.

“Not at all,” said Cathy; “you are wrong there, sir. His marriage with me was a little bit of a stop-gap and served to keep him straight for a month or two; but for that, he would have done for himself before he has. Do you think I’ve had a bargain in him, sir? No. Marriage is a thing that can’t be undone, Major Parrifer: but I wish to my heart that I was at home again in father’s cottage, light-hearted Cathy Reed.”

The Major made no answer. Cathy went on.

“When the news was brought to me by his servant, that he had killed a man and was lying raving, I thought it time to go and see about him. They would not let me into the lock-up house where he was lying—and you might have heard his ravings outside: *I* did. I said I was his wife; and then they told me I had better see Captain Williams. I went to head-quarters and saw Captain Williams. He seemed to doubt me; so I showed him the certificate, and told him my baby was at home, turned six weeks old. He was very kind then, sir; he took me to see my husband; and he advised me to come over here at once and give you the particulars. I told him what was the truth—that I had no money, and the lodgings were owing for. He said the lodgings must

wait: and he would lend me enough money for the journey."

"Did you see him?" growled Major Parrifer.

Cathy knew that he alluded to his son, though he would not speak the name.

"I saw him, sir; I told you so. He did not know me or anybody else; he was raving mad, and shaking so that the bed shook under him."

"How is it that they have not written to me?" demanded Major Parrifer.

"I don't think anybody liked to do it. Captain Williams said the best plan would be for me to come. He asked me if I'd like to hear the truth of the past as regarded my husband; or if I would just come here and tell you the bare facts that were known, about his illness and the charge against him. I said I'd prefer to hear the truth—that it couldn't be worse than I suspected. Then he went on to the drinking and the gambling and the debts, just as I have repeated to you, sir. He was very gentle; but he said he thought it would be mistaken kindness not to let me fully understand the state of things. He said Mr. Parrifer's father, or some other friend, had better go over to Ireland."

In spite of himself, a groan escaped Major Parrifer. The blow was the worst that could have fallen upon him. He had not cared much for his daughters; his ambition was centred

in his son. Visions of a sojourn at Dublin and of figuring off at the Vice-Regal Court, himself, his wife, and his son, had floated occasionally in rose-coloured clouds before his brain, poor pompous old simpleton. And now—to picture the visit he must set out upon ere the night was over nearly drove him wild with pain. Cathy unlatched the door, but waited to speak again before she opened it.

“I’ll rid the house of me now that I have broke it to you, sir. If you want me I shall be found at father’s cottage; I suppose they’ll let me stay there: if not, you can hear of me at the place where I’ve left my baby. And if your son should ever wake out of his delirium, Major Parrifer, he will be able to tell you that if he had listened to me and heeded me, or even only come to spend his evenings with me—which it’s months since he did—he would not have been in this plight now. Should they try him for murder; and nothing can save him from it if he gets well; I——”

A succession of screams cut short what Cathy was about to add. In her surprise she drew wide the door, and was confronted by Miss Jemima Parrifer. That young lady, curious upon the subject of the visit and visitor, had thought it well to put her ear to the library door. To no effect, however, until Cathy unlatched it. And then she heard more than she had thought for.

"Is it *you!*" roughly cried Miss Jemima, recognizing her for the ill-talked of Cathy Reed, the daughter of the Major's enemy. "What do you want here?"

Cathy did not answer. She walked to the hall-door and let herself out. Miss Jemima went on into the library.

"Papa, what was it she was saying about Spencer, that vile girl? What did she do here? Why did she send in her name as Mrs. Parrifer?"

The Major might have heard the questions, or he might not; he didn't respond to them. Miss Jemima, looking closely at him in the dusk of the room, saw a grey, worn, terror-stricken face, that looked as her father's had never looked yet.

"Oh, papa! what is the matter? Are you ill?"

He walked towards her in the quietest manner possible, took her arm and pushed her out at the door. Not rudely; softly, as one might do who is in a dream.

"Presently, presently," he muttered in quite an altered voice, low and timid. And Miss Jemima found the door bolted against her.

It must have been an awful moment with him. Look on what side he would, there was no comfort. Spencer Parrifer was ruined past redemption. He might die in this illness, and then, what of his soul? Not that the Major

was given to that kind of reflection. Escaping the illness, he must be tried—for his life, as Cathy had phrased it. And, escaping that, if the miracle were possible, there remained the miserable debts and the miserable wife he had clogged himself with.

Curious enough, as the miserable Major, most miserable in that moment, pictured these things, there suddenly rose up before his mind's eye another picture. A remembrance of Reed, who had stood in that very room less than twelve months ago, in the dim light of late night, with his hair cut close, and his semi-threat: "*It will come home to you, Major Parrifer.*" Had it come home to him? Home to him already? The drops of agony broke out on his face as he asked the question. It seemed to him, in that moment of excitement, so very like some of Heaven's own lightning.

One grievous portion of the many ills had perhaps not fallen, but for the putting of Reed in prison—the marriage; and that one was more humiliating to Major Parrifer's spirit than all the rest. Had Reed been at liberty, Cathy might not have made her escape untracked, and the bitter marriage might, in that case, have been avoided.

A groan, and now another, broke from the Major. How it had come home to him! not his selfishness and his barbarity and his pride, but this blow of sorrow. Reed's month of

prison, compared to this, was a drop of water to the wide waves of the ocean. As to the girl—when Reed had come asking for tidings of her, it had seemed to the Major not of the least moment whither she had gone or what ill she had entered on: was she not a common labourer's daughter, and that labourer George Reed? Even then, at that very time, she was his daughter-in-law, and his son the one to be humiliated. Major Parrifer ground his teeth, and only stopped when he remembered that something must be done about that disgraceful son.

He started that night for Ireland. Cathy, affronted at some remark made by Mrs. Reed, took herself off from her father's cottage. She had a little money left yet from her journey, and could spend it.

Spencer Gervoise Daubeney Parrifer (the Major and his wife had bestowed upon him the fine names in pride at his baptism) died in prison. He lived but a day after Major Parrifer's arrival, and never recognized him. It of course saved the trial, when he would probably have been convicted of manslaughter. It saved the payment of his hundreds of debts too; post-obits and all; he died before his father. But it could not save exposure; it could not save the facts from the world. Major and Mrs. Parrifer, so to say, would never lift up their heads again; the sun of their life had set.

Neither would Cathy lift hers yet awhile. She contrived to quarrel with her father; the Parrifers never took the remotest notice of her; she was nearly starved and her baby too. What little she earned was by hard work: but it would not keep her, and she applied to the parish. The parish in turn applied to Major Parrifer, and forced from him as much as the law allowed, a few shillings a week. The having to apply to the parish was, for Cathy, a humiliation never to be forgotten. The neighbours made their comments.

“Cathy Reed have brought her pigs to a fine market!”

So she had; and she felt it more than the loss of her baby, who died soon after. Better that she had married an honest day-labourer; and Cathy knew it now.

VI.

LEASE, THE POINTSMAN.

IT happened when we were staying at our other house, Crabb Cot. In saying "we" were staying at it, I mean the family, for Tod and I were at school.

Crabb Cot lay beyond the village of Crabb. Just across the road, a few yards higher up, was the large farm of Mr. Coney; and his house and ours were the only two that stood there. Crabb Cot was a smaller and more cosy house than Dyke Manor; and, when there, we were not so very far from Worcester: less than half way, comparing it with the Manor.

Crabb was a large and straggling parish. North Crabb, which was nearest to us, had the church and schools in it, but very few houses. South Crabb, further off, was more populous. Nearly a mile beyond South Crabb, there was a regular junction of rails. Lines, crossing each other in a most bewildering manner, led off in all directions; and it required no little manœuvring to send the trains

away right at busy times. Which of course was the pointsman's affair.

The busiest days had place in summer, when excursion trains were in full swing: but they would come occasionally at other periods, driving the South Crabb station people off their heads with bother before night.

The pointsman was Harry Lease. I dare say you have noticed how certain names seem to belong to certain places. At North Crabb and South Crabb, and in the district round about, the name of Lease was as common as are blackberries in a hedge; and if the different Leases had been cousins in the days gone by, the relationship was lost now. There might be seven-and-twenty Leases, in and out, but Harry Lease was not, so far as he knew, akin to any of them.

South Crabb was not much of a place at best. A part of it, Crabb Lane, branching off towards Massock's brick-fields, was crowded as a London street. Poor dwellings were huddled together, and children jostled each other on the door-steps. Squire Todhetley said he remembered it when it really was a lane, hedges on either side and a pond that was never dry. Harry Lease lived in the last house, a thatched hut with three rooms in it. He was a steady, hardworking, civil man, superior to some of his neighbours, who were given to reel home at night and beat their wives on arrival. His

wife, a nice kind of woman to talk to, was a poor manager ; but the five children were better behaved and better kept than the other grubbers in the gutter.

Lease was the pointsman at South Crabb Junction, and aided also in the general business there. He walked to his work at six in the morning, carrying his breakfast with him ; went home to dinner at twelve, the slack part of the day at the station, and had his tea taken to him at four ; leaving in general at nine. Sometimes his wife arrived with the tea ; sometimes the eldest child, Polly, an intelligent girl of six. But, one afternoon in September, a crew of mischievous boys from the brickfields espied what Polly was carrying. They set upon her, turned over the can of tea in fighting for it, ate the bread and butter, tore her pinafore in the scrimmage, and frightened her nearly to death. After that, Lease said that the child should not be sent with the tea : so, when his wife could not take it, he went without tea. Polly and her father were uncommonly alike, too quiet to do much battle with the world : sensitive, in fact ; though it sounds odd to say that.

During the month of November one of the busy days occurred at South Crabb Junction. There was a winter meeting on Worcester race-course, a cattle and pig show in a town larger than Worcester, and two or three markets and

other causes of increased traffic, all falling on the same day. What with cattle trains, and ordinary and special trains, and goods trains, and the grunting of ill-conditioned pigs, Lease had plenty to do to keep his points in order.

How it fell out he never knew. Between eight and nine o'clock, when a train was expected in on its way to Worcester, Lease forgot to shift the points. A goods train had come in ten minutes before, for which he had had to turn the points, and he never turned them back again. On came the train, almost as quickly as though it had not to pull up at South Crabb Junction. Watson the station-master came out to be in readiness.

"The engine has got her steam on to-night," he remarked to Lease as he watched the red lights, like two great eyes, come tearing on. "She'll have to back."

She did something worse than back. Instead of slackening along on the near lines, she went flying off at a tangent to some outer ones on which the goods train stood, waiting until the passenger train should pass. There was a sound from the whistle, a great collision, a noise of hissing steam, a sense of dire confusion: and for one minute afterwards a dead lull, as if every body and thing were paralysed.

"You never turned the points!" shrieked the station-master to Lease.

Lease made no rejoinder. He backed

against the wall like a helpless man, his arms stretched out, his face and eyes wild with horror. Watson thought he was going to have a fit, and shook him roughly.

"*You've done it nicely, you have!*" he added, as he flew off to the scene of disaster, from which the steam was beginning to clear away. But Lease reached it before him.

"God forgive me! God have mercy upon me!"

A porter, running side by side with Lease, heard him say it. In telling it afterwards, the man described the tone as one of piteous agony.

The Squire and Mrs. Todhetley, who had been a few miles off to spend the day, were in the train with Lena. The child did nothing but cry and sob; not with damage, but fright. Mr. Coney also happened to be in it; and Massock, who owned the brick-fields. They were not hurt at all, only a little shaken, and (as the Squire put it afterwards) mortally scared. Massock, an under-bred man, who had grown rich by his brick-fields, was more pompous than a lord. The three seized upon the station-master.

"Now then, Watson," cried Mr. Coney, "what was the cause of all this?"

"If there have been any negligence here—and I know there have—you shall be transported for it, Watson, as sure as I'm a living man," roared Massock.

"I'm afraid, gentlemen, that something was wrong with the points," acknowledged Watson, willing to shift the blame from himself, and too confused to consider policy. "At least that's all I can think."

"With the points!" cried Massock. "Them's Harry Lease's work. Was he on to-night?"

"Lease is here as usual, Mr. Massock. I don't say this lies at his door," added Watson, hastily. "The points might have been out of order; or something else wrong totally different. I should like to know, for my part, what possessed Roberts to bring up his train at such speed."

Darting in and out of the heap of confusion like a mad spirit; now trying by his own effort to lift the broken parts of carriages off some sufferer, now carrying a poor fellow away to safety, but always in the thick of danger; went Harry Lease. Braving the heat and steam as though he felt them not, he flew everywhere, himself and his lantern alike shaking with agitation.

"Come and look here, Harry; I'm afraid he's dead," said a porter, holding his light down to a man's face. The words arrested Mr. Todhetley, who was searching for Lease to let off a little of his explosive anger. It was Roberts, the driver of the passenger train, that lay there, his face white and still. Somehow

the sight made the Squire still, too. Raising Roberts's head, the men put a drop of brandy between his lips, and he moved. Lease broke into a low glad cry.

"He is not dead ! he is not dead !"

The angry reproaches died away on the Squire's tongue : it did not seem quite the time to speak them. By-and-by, he came upon Lease again. The man had halted to lean against some palings, feeling unaccountably strange, much as though the world around were closing to him.

"Had you been drinking to-night, Lease ?"

The question was put quietly : which was, so to say, a feather in the hot Squire's cap. Lease only shook his head by way of answer. He had a pale, gentle kind of face, with brown eyes that always wore a sad expression. He never drank ; and the Squire knew it.

"Then how came you to neglect the points, Lease, and cause this awful accident ?"

"I don't know, sir," answered Lease, rousing up from his lethargy, but speaking like one in a dream. "I can't think but what I turned them as usual."

"You knew the train was coming ? It was the ordinary train."

"I knew it was coming," assented Lease. "I watched it come along, standing by the side of Mr. Watson. If I had not set the points right, why, I should have thought surely

of them then ; it stands to reason I should. But never such a thought came into my mind, sir. I waited there, just as if all was right ; and I believe I *did* shift the points."

Lease did not put this forth as a false excuse : he only spoke aloud the problem that was working in his mind. Having shifted the points regularly for five years, it seemed just impossible that he could have neglected it now. And yet the man could not *remember* to have done it this evening.

" You can't call it to mind ? " said Squire Todhetley, repeating his last words.

" No, I can't, sir : and no wonder, with all this confusion around me and the distress I'm in. I may be able to do so to-morrow."

" Now look you here, Lease," said the Squire, getting just a little cross. " If you had put the points right you couldn't fail to remember it. And what causes you to be in distress, I'd like to ask, but the knowledge that you *didn't*, and that all this carnage is owing to you ? "

" There is such a thing as doing things mechanically, sir, without the mind being conscious of it."

" Doing things wilfully," roared the Squire. " Do you want to tell me I am a fool to my face ? "

" It has often happened, sir, that when I have wound up the mantel-shelf clock at night

in our sleeping-room, I'll not know the next minute whether I've wound it or not, and I have to try it again, or else ask my wife," went on Lease, his eyes looking straight out in the darkness, as if he could see the mantel-shelf clock then. "I can't think but what it must have been just in that way that I put the points right to-night."

Squire Todhetley, in his anger, which was growing hot again, felt that he should like to give Lease a sound shaking. He had no notion of such talk as this.

"I don't know whether you are a knave or a fool, Lease. Killing men and women and children; breaking arms and shins and bones; putting a whole trainful into mortal fright; smashing goods and property and engines to atoms; turning the world, in fact, upside down, so that people don't know whether they stand on their heads or their heels! You may think you can do this with impunity perhaps, but the law will soon teach you better. I should not like to go to bed with human lives upon my soul."

The Squire disappeared in a whirlwind. Lease—who seemed to have taken a leaf out of his own theory, and listened mechanically—closed his eyes and put his head back against the top ledge of the palings, like one who has had a shock. He went home when there was nothing more to do. Not down the frequented

highway, but choosing the field path, where he would not be likely to meet a soul. Crabb Lane, accustomed to put itself into a state of commotion for nothing at all, had got something at last, and was up in arms. All the men employed at the station lived in Crabb Lane. The wife and children of Bowen, the stoker of the passenger train,—dead—also inhabited a room in that screaming locality. So that when Lease came in view of the place, he saw a noisy multitude, though it was then long after ordinary bed-time. Groups stood in the highway; heads, thrust forth at upstairs windows, were shrieking remarks across the street and back again. Keeping on the far side of the hedge, Lease got in by the back door unperceived. His wife was sitting by the fire, shaking all over. She started up.

“Oh Harry! what is the truth of this?”

He did not answer. Not in rough neglect; Lease was as civil indoors as out, which can't be said of everybody; but as if he did not hear it. The supper; bread and half a cold red-herring; was on the table. Generally he was hungry enough for supper, but he never glanced at it this evening.

Sitting down, he looked into the fire and remained still, listening perhaps to the hubbub outside. His wife, half dead with fear and apprehension, could keep silence no longer, and asked again.

"I don't know," he answered then. "They say that I never turned the points; I'm trying to remember doing it, Mary. My senses have been scared out of me."

"But *don't* you remember doing it?"

He put his hands to his temples, and the eyes took that far-off, sad look, often seen in eyes when the heart is troubled. With all his might and main, the man was trying to recal to mind the occurrence which would not come into it. A dread conviction began to dawn within him that it never would or could come; and Lease's head and face grew wet with cold drops of agony.

"I turned the points for the down goods train," he said presently; "I remember that. When the goods came in, I know I was in the signal house. Then I took a message to Hoar; and next I stepped across with some oil for the engine of an up train that dashed in; they called out that it wanted some. I helped to do it, and took the oil back again. It would be then that I went to put the points right," he added after a pause. "I *hope* I did."

"But, Harry, don't you remember doing it?"

"No, I don't; there's where it is."

"You always put the points straight at once after the train has passed?"

"Not if I'm called off by other work. It ought to be done. A pointsman should stand while the train passes, and then step off to right

the points at once. But when you are called off half a dozen ways to things crying out to be done, you can't spend the time in waiting for the points. We've never had a harder day's work at the station than this has been, Mary; trains in, trains out; the place has hardly been free a minute together. And the extra telegraphing!—half the passengers that stopped seemed to want to send messages. When six o'clock came I was worn out; done up; fit to drop."

Mrs. Lease gave a start. An idea flashed into her mind, causing her to ask mentally whether *she* could have had indirectly a hand in the calamity. For that had been one of the days when her husband had no tea taken to him. She had been very busy washing, and the baby was sick and cross: that had been quite enough to fill incapable Mrs. Lease's hands, without bothering about her husband's tea. And, of all days in the year, it seemed that he had, on this one, most needed tea. Worn out! done up!

The noise in Crabb Lane was increasing, voices sounded louder, and Mrs. Lease put her apron over her ears. Just then a sudden interruption occurred. Polly, supposed to be safe asleep above stairs, burst into the kitchen in her night-gown, and flew into her father's arms, sobbing and crying.

"Oh father, is it true?—is it true?"

“Why—Polly!” cried the man, looking at her, in astonishment, “What’s this?”

She hid her face on his waistcoat, her hands clinging round him. Polly had awoke and heard the comments outside. She was too nervous and excitable for Crabb Lane.

“They are saying you have killed Kitty Bowen’s father. It isn’t true, father! Go out and tell them that it isn’t true!”

His own nerves were unstrung; his strength had gone out of him; it only needed something of this kind to finish up Lease; and he broke into sobs nearly as loud as the child’s. Holding her to him with a tight grasp, they cried together. If Lease had never known agony before in his life, he knew it then.

The days went on. There was no longer holding-out on Lease’s part on the matter of points: all the world said he had been guilty of neglecting to turn them; and he supposed he had. He accepted the fate meekly, without resistance, his manner strangely still, like one who has been subdued. When talked to, he freely avowed that it remained a puzzle to him how he could have forgotten the points, and what made him forget them. He shrank neither from reproach nor abuse; listening patiently to all who chose to attack him, as if he had no more any right to claim a place in the world.

He was not spared. Coroner and jury,

friends and foes, alike went on at him, painting his sins in flaring colours, and calling him names to his face. "Murderer" was one of the politest of them. Four had died in all: Roberts was not expected to live; the rest were getting well. There would have been no trouble over the inquest (held at the "Bull," between Crabb Lane and the station), it might have been finished in a day, and Lease committed for trial, but that one of those who had died was a lawyer; and his brother (also a lawyer) and other of his relatives (likewise lawyers) chose to raise a commotion. Mr. Massock helped them. Passengers must be examined; rails tried; the points tested; every conceivable obstacle was put in the way of a conclusion. Fifteen times had the jury to go and take a look at the spot, and see the working of the points tested. And so the inquest was adjourned from time to time, and might get finished perhaps under a year.

The public were like so many wolves, all howling at Lease; from the relatives aforesaid and brickfield Massock, down to the men and women of Crabb Lane. Lease was home on bail, surrendering himself at every fresh meeting of the inquest. A few ill-conditioned malcontents had begun to hiss him as he passed in and out of Crabb Lane.

When we got home for the Christmas holidays, nothing met us but tales of Lease's wickedness, in having sent the one train upon the other. The Squire grew hot in talking of it. Tod, given to be contrary, said he should like to have Lease's own version of the affair. A remark that affronted the Squire.

"You can go off and get it from him, sir. Lease won't refuse it; he'd give it to the dickens, for asking. He likes nothing better than to talk of it."

"After all, it was but a misfortune," said Tod. "It was not done willingly."

"Not done willingly!" stuttered the Pater in his rage. "When I, and Lena, and her mother were in the train, and might have been smashed to atoms! When Coney, and Massock (not that I like the fellow) and scores more were put in jeopardy, and some were killed; yes sir, killed. A misfortune! Johnny, if you stand there with a grin across your mouth, like an idiot, I'll send you back to school: you shall both pack off this very hour. A misfortune, indeed! Lease deserves hanging."

The next morning we came upon Lease accidentally in the fields. He was leaning over the gate amid the trees, as Tod and I crossed the rivulet bridge—which was nothing but a plank. Two bounds, and we were up with him.

“Now for it, Lease!” cried Tod. “Let us hear a bit about the thing.”

Was not Lease altered! His cheeks were thin and white, his eyes had nothing but gloom in them. Standing up, he touched his hat respectfully.

“Ay, sir, it has been a sad time,” answered Lease, in a low, patient voice, as if he felt worn out with weariness. “I little thought when I last shut you and Mr. Johnny into the carriage the morning you left, that misfortune was so close at hand.” For, just before it happened, we had been at home for a day’s holiday.

“Well, tell us about it.”

Tod stood with his arm round the trunk of a tree, and I sat down on an opposite stump. Lease had very little to say; nothing, except that he must have forgotten to change the points.

And that made Tod stare. I, watching him, saw his brow go in and his lips go out, a sure sign of displeasure. Tod, like the Pater, was hasty by nature. Knowing Lease’s good character, he had not supposed him guilty; and to hear the man quietly admit that he *was*, excited Tod’s ire.

“What do you mean, Lease?”

“Mean, sir?” returned Lease, meekly.

“Do you mean to say that you did *not* attend to the points?—that you just let one train run on to the other?”

"Yes sir; that is how it must have been. I didn't believe it, sir, for a long while afterwards: not for several hours."

"A long while, that," said Tod, an unpleasant sound of mockery in his tone.

"No, sir; I know it's not much, counting by time," answered Lease patiently. "But nobody can ever picture how long those hours seemed to me. They were like years. I couldn't get the idea into me at all that I had not set the points as usual; it seemed a thing unbelievable; but, try as I would, I was unable to call to mind the having done it."

"Well, I must say that is a nice thing to confess to, Lease! And there was I, yesterday afternoon, taking your part and quarrelling with my father."

"I am sorry for that, sir. I am not worth having my part taken in anything, since that happened."

"But how came you to *do it*?"

"It's a question that I shall never be able to answer, sir. We had a busy day, were on the run from morning till night, and there was a great deal of confusion at the station: but it was no worse than many a day that went before it."

"Well, I shall be off," said Tod. "This has shut me up. I thought of going in for you, Lease, finding everybody else was dead against you. A misfortune is a misfortune,

but wilful carelessness is sin: and my father and his wife and my little sister were in the train. Come along, Johnny."

"Directly, Tod. I'll catch you up. I say, Lease, how will it end?" I asked, as Tod went on.

"It can't end better than two years' imprisonment for me, sir; and I suppose it may end worse. It is not *that* I think of."

"What else, then?"

"Four dead already, sir; four—and one soon to follow them, making five," he answered, his voice hushed nearly to a whisper. "Master Johnny, it lies on me always, a dreadful weight never to be got rid of. When I was young, I had a kind of low fever, and used to see in my dreams some dreadful task too big to attempt, and yet I had to do it; and the weight on my mind was awful. I didn't think, till now, such a weight could fall in real life. Sleeping or waking, sir, I see those four before me dead. Squire Todhetley told me that I had their lives on my soul. And it is so."

I did not know what to answer.

"So you see, sir, I don't think much of the imprisonment; if I did, I might be wanting to get the suspense over. It's not any term of imprisonment, no, not though it were for life, that can wash out the past. I'd give my own life, sir, twice over if that could undo it."

Lease had his arm on the gate as he spoke, leaning forward. I could not help feeling sorry for him.

"If people knew how I'm punished within myself, Master Johnny, they'd perhaps not be so harsh. I have never had a proper night's rest since it happened, sir. I have to get up and walk about in the middle of the night because I can't lie. The sight of the dawn makes me sick, and I say to myself, How shall I get through the day? When bed-time comes, I wonder how I shall lie till morning. Often I wish it had pleased God to take me before that day had happened."

"Why don't they get the inquest over, Lease?"

"There's something or other always brought up to delay it, sir. I don't see the need of it. If it would bring the dead back, why they might delay it; but it won't. They might as well let it end, and sentence me, and have done with it. Each time when I go back home through Crabb Lane, the men and women call out, What, put off again! what, ain't he in gaol yet! Which is the place they say I ought to have been in all along."

"I suppose the coroner knows you'll not run away, Lease."

"Everybody knows that, sir."

"Some would, though, in your place."

"I don't know where they'd run to," returned

Lease. "They couldn't run away from their own minds—and that's the worst part. Sometimes I wonder whether I shall ever get it off mine, sir, or if I shall have it on me, like this, to the end of my life. The Lord knows what it is to me ; nobody else does."

You cannot always make things fit into one another. I was thinking so as I left Lease and went after Tod. It was an awful carelessness not to have set the points; causing death, and sorrow, and distress to many people. Looking at it from their side, the pointsman was detestable ; only fit, as the Squire said, for hanging. But, looking at it side by side with Lease, seeing his sad face, and his self-reproach, and his patient suffering, it seemed altogether different ; and the two sides would not by any means fit in together.

Christmas week, and the absence of a juror who had gone out visiting, made another excuse for putting off the inquest to the next week. When that came, the coroner was ill. There seemed to be no end to the delays, and the public steam was getting up in consequence. As to Lease, he went about dazed, like a man who is looking for something that he has lost and cannot find.

One day when the ice lay in Crabb Lane, and I was taking the slides on my way through it to join Tod, who had gone rabbit-shooting, a little girl ran across my feet, and was

knocked down. I fell too; and the child began to cry. Picking her up, I saw it was Polly Lease.

"You little stupid! why did you run into my path like that?"

"Please, sir, I didn't see you," she sobbed, "I was running after father. Mother saw him in the field yonder, and sent me to tell him we'd got a bit o' fire."

Polly had grazed both her knees; they began to bleed just a little, and she went into convulsions nearly at sight of the blood. I carried her in. There was about a handful of fire in the grate—I'm sure I could have put it into my two hands. The mother sat on a low stool, close into it, nursing one of the children, and the rest sat on the floor.

"I never saw such a child as this in all my life, Mrs. Lease. Because she has hurt her knees a bit; and sees a drop of blood, she's going to die of fright. Look here."

Mrs. Lease put down the boy and took Polly, who was shaking all over with her deep low sobs.

"It was always so, sir," said Mrs. Lease; "always since she was a baby. She is the timorest-natured child possible. We have tried every thing; coaxing, and scolding too; but we can't get her out of it. If she pricks her finger her face turns white."

"I'd be more of a woman than to cry at

nothing, if I were you, Polly," said I, sitting on the window-ledge, while Mrs. Lease washed the knees; which were hardly damaged at all when they came to be looked into. But Polly only clung to her mother, with her face hidden, and gave a deep sob now and then.

"Look up, Polly. What's this?"

I put it into her hand as I spoke; a bath bun that I had been carrying with me, in case I did not get home to luncheon. Polly looked round, and the sight dried the tears on her swollen face. You never saw such a change all in a moment, or such eager, glad little eyes as hers.

"Divide it, mother," said she. "Leave a bit for father."

Two of them came flocking round like a couple of young wolves; the youngest couldn't get up, and the one Mrs. Lease had been nursing stayed on the floor where she put him. He had a sickly face, with great bright grey eyes and hot, red lips.

"What's the matter with him, Mrs. Lease?"

"With little Tom, sir? I think it's a kind of fever. He never was strong; none of them are: and of course these bad times can but tell upon us."

"Don't forget father, mother," said Polly. "Leave the biggest piece for father."

"Now I tell you all what it is," said I to the children, when Mrs. Lease began to divide it into five hundred pieces, "that bun's for Polly, because she has hurt herself: you shall not take any of it from her. Give it to Polly, Mrs. Lease."

Of all the uproars ever heard, those little cormorants set up the worst. Mrs. Lease looked at me.

"They must have a bit, sir: they must indeed. Polly wouldn't eat all herself, Master Ludlow; you couldn't get her to."

But I was determined Polly should have it. It was through me she got hurt; and besides, I liked her.

"Now just listen, you little pigs. I'll go to the baker's, Ford's, and bring you all a penny plum-bun a piece, but Polly must have this one. They have got lots of currants in them, for children that don't squeal. How many are there of you? One, two, three,—four."

Catching up my cap, I was going out when Mrs. Lease touched me. "Do you really mean it, sir?" she asked in a whisper.

"Mean what? That I am going to bring the buns? Of course I mean it. I'll be back with them directly."

"Oh, sir—but do forgive me for making free to ask such a thing—if you would but let it be a half-quartern loaf instead?"

“A half quartern loaf!”

“They’ve not had a bit within their lips this day, Master Ludlow,” she said, catching up her breath, as her face, which had flushed, turned pale again. “Last night I divided between the four of them a piece of bread half the size of my hand; Tom, he couldn’t eat.”

I stared for a minute. “How is it, Mrs. Lease? can you not get enough food?”

“I don’t know where we should get it from, sir. Lease has not broken his fast since yesterday at midday.”

Dame Ford put the loaf in paper for me, wondering what on earth I wanted with it, as I could see by her inquisitive eyes, but not liking to ask; and I carried it back with the four buns. They were little wolves, and nothing else, when they saw the food.

“How has this come about, Mrs. Lease?” I asked, while they were eating the bread she cut them, and she had taken Tom on her lap again.

“Why, sir, it is eight weeks now, or hard upon it, since my husband earned anything. They didn’t even pay him for the last week he was at work, as the accident happened in it. We had nothing in hand; people with only eighteen shillings a week and five children, can’t save; and we have been living on our things. But there’s nothing left now to make

money of—as you may see by the bare room, sir.”

“Does not anybody help you?”

“Help us!” returned Mrs. Lease. “Why, Master Ludlow, people, for the most part, are so incensed against my husband, that they’d take the bread out of our lips, instead of putting a bit into them. All their help goes to poor Nancy Bowen and her children: and Lease is glad it should be so. When I carried Tom to Mr. Cole’s yesterday, he said that what the child wanted was nourishment.”

“This must try Lease.”

“Yes,” she said, her face flushing again, but speaking very quietly. “Taking one thing with another, I am not sure but it is killing him.”

After this break, I did not care to go to the shooting, but turned back to Crabb Cot. Mrs. Todhetley was alone in the bow-windowed parlour, so I told her of the state the Leases were in, and asked if she would not help them.

“I don’t know what to say about it, Johnny,” she said, after a pause. “If I were willing, you know Mr. Todhetley would not be. He can’t forgive Lease for his carelessness. Every time Lena wakes up from sleep in a fright, fancying it is another accident, his anger returns. We hear her crying out, you know, down here in an evening.”

“The carelessness was no fault of Lease’s children, that they should suffer for it.”

“When you get older, Johnny, you will find that the consequences of people’s faults fall more on others than on themselves. It is very sad the Leases should be in this state; I am sorry for them.”

“Then you’ll help them a bit, good mother.”

Mrs. Todhetley was always ready to help any one, not needing to be urged; on the other hand, she liked to bend implicitly to the opinions of the Squire. Between the two, she went into a dilemma.

“Suppose it were Lena, starving for want of food and warmth?” I said. “Or Hugh sick with fever, as that young Tom is? Those children have done no more harm than ours.”

Mrs. Todhetley put her hand up to her face, and her mild eyes looked nearly as sad as Lease’s.

“Will you take it to them yourself, Johnny, in a covered basket, and not let it be seen? That is, make it your own doing?”

“Yes.”

“Go to the kitchen then, and ask Molly. There are some odds and ends of things in the larder that will not be particularly wanted. You see, Johnny, I do not like to take an active part in this; it would seem like opposing the Squire.”

Molly was stooping before the big fire, bast-

ing the meat, and in one of her vile humours. If I wanted to rob the larder I must do it, she cried; it was my business, not hers; and she dashed the iron basting spoon across the table by way of chorus.

I gave a good look round the larder, and took a raised pork pie that had a piece cut out of it, and a leg of mutton three parts eaten. On the shelf were a dozen mince pies, just out of their patty-pans; I took six and left six. Molly, screwing her face round the kitchen door, caught sight of them as they went into the basket, and rushed after me out of the house, shrieking out for her mince-pies.

The race went on. She was a woman not to be daunted. Just as we turned round by the yellow barn, I first, she raving behind redder than a turkey-cock, the Squire pounced upon us, asking what the uproar meant. Molly told her tale; I was a thief, and had gone off with the whole larder, more particularly with her mince-pies.

“Open the basket, Johnny,” said the Squire: which was the one Tod and I used when we went fishing.

No sooner was it done than Molly marched off with the pies in triumph. The Pater regarded the pork pie and the meat with a curious gaze.

“This is for you and Joe, I suppose. I should like to know for how many more.”

I was one of the worst to conceal things, when taken to like this, and he got it all out of me in no time. And then he put his hand on my shoulder and ordered me to say *who* the things were for. Which I had to do.

Well, there was a row. He wanted to know what I meant by being wicked enough to give food to Lease. I said it was for the children. I'm afraid I cried a little, for I did not like him to be angry with me, but I know I promised not to eat any dinner at home for three days if he would let me take the meat. Molly's comments, echoing through the house, betrayed to Mrs. Todhetley what had happened, and she came down the road with a shawl over her head. She told the Squire the truth then: that she had sanctioned it. She said she feared the Leases were quite in extremity, and begged him to let the meat go.

"Be off for this once, you young thief," stamped the Squire, "but don't let me catch you at anything of this sort again."

So the meat went to the Leases, and two loaves that Mrs. Todhetley whispered me to order for them at Ford's. When I reached home with the empty basket, they were going in to dinner. I took a book and stayed in the parlour. In a minute or two the Squire sent to ask what I was doing that for.

"It's all right, Thomas. I don't want any dinner to-day."

Old Thomas went away and returned again, saying the master ordered me to go in. But I wouldn't do anything of the sort. If he forgot the bargain, I did not.

Out came the Squire, his face red, his napkin in his hand, and laid hold of me by the shoulders.

"You obstinate young Turk! How dare you defy me? Come along."

"But it is not to defy you, sir. It was a bargain, you know; I promised."

"What was a bargain?"

"That I should not eat dinner for three days. Indeed I meant it."

The Squire's answer was to propel me into the dining-room. "Move down, Joe," he said, "I'll have him by me to-day. I'll see whether he is to starve himself out of bravado."

"Why, what's up?" asked Tod, as he went to a lower seat. "What have you been doing, Johnny?"

"Never mind," said the Squire, putting enough mutton on my plate for two. "You eat that, Mr. Johnny."

It went on so through the dinner. Mrs. Todhetley gave me a big share of apple pudding; and, when the macaroni came on, the Squire heaped my plate. And I know it was all done to show he was not really angry with me for having taken the things.

Mr. Cole, the surgeon, came in after dinner, and was told of my wickedness. Lena ran

up to me and said might she send her new sixpence to the poor little children who had no bread to eat.

“What’s that Lease about, that he does not go to work?” asked the Squire, in a loud tone. “Letting folks hear that his young ones are starving!”

“The man can’t work,” said Mr. Cole. “He is out on probation, you know, waiting for the verdict, and the sentence on him that is to follow.”

“Then why don’t they return their verdict and sentence him?” demanded the Squire in his hot way.

“Ah!” said Mr. Cole, “it’s what they ought to have done long ago.”

“What will it be? Transportation?”

“I should take care it was *not*, if I were on the jury. The man had too much work on him that day, and had had nothing to eat or drink for too many hours.”

“I won’t hear a word in his defence,” growled the Squire.

When the jury met for the last time, Lease was ill. A day or two before that, some one had brought Lease word that Roberts, who had been lingering all that while in the infirmary at Worcester, was going at last. Upon which

Lease started to see him. It was not the day for visitors at the infirmary, but he gained admittance. Roberts was lying in the accident ward, with his head low and a blue look in his face; and the first thing Lease did, when he began to speak, was to burst out crying. The man's strength had gone down to nothing and his spirit was broken. Roberts made out that he was speaking of his distress at having been the cause of the calamity, and asking to be forgiven.

"Mate," said Roberts, putting out his hand that Lease might take it, "I've never had an ill thought to ye. Mishaps come to all of us that have to do with rail-travelling; us drivers get more nor you pointsmen. It might have happened to me to be the cause, just as well as to you. Don't think no more of it."

"Say you forgive me," urged Lease, "or I shall not know how to bear it."

"I forgive thee with my whole heart and soul. I've had a spell of it here, Lease, waiting for death, knowing it must come to me, and I've got to look for it kindly. I don't think I'd go back to the world now if I could. I'm going to a better. It seems just peace, and nothing less. Shake hands, mate."

They shook hands.

"I wish ye'd lift my head a bit," Roberts said, after awhile. "The nurse she come and took away my pillow, thinking I might die

easier, I suppose : I've seen her do it to others. Maybe I was a'most gone, and the sight of you woke me up again like."

Lease sat down on the bed and put the man's head upon his breast in the position that seemed most easy to him ; and Roberts died there.

It was one of the worst days we had that winter. Lease had a night's walk home of many miles, the sleet and the wind beating at him all the way. He was not well clad either, for his best things had been pawned.

So that when the inquest assembled two days afterwards, Lease did not appear at it. He was in bed with inflammation of the chest, and Mr. Cole told the coroner that it would be dangerous to take him out of it. Some of them called it bronchitis ; but the Squire never went in for new names, and never would.

"I tell you what it is, gentlemen," broke in Mr. Cole, when they were quarrelling whether there should be another adjournment or not, "you'll put off and put off, until Lease slips through your fingers."

"Oh, will he, though !" blustered old Massock. "He had better try at it ! We'd soon fetch him back again."

"You'd be clever to do it," said the doctor.

Any way, whether it was this or not, they thought better of the adjournment, and gave their verdict. "Manslaughter against Henry

Lease." And the coroner made out his warrant of committal to Worcester county prison : where Lease would lie until the March assizes.

"I am not sure but it ought to have been returned Wilful Murder," remarked the Squire, as he and the doctor turned out of the Bull, and picked their way over the slush towards Crabb Lane.

"It might make no difference, one way or the other," answered Mr. Cole.

"Make no difference ! What d'ye mean ? Murder and manslaughter are two opposite crimes, Cole, and punished accordingly. You see, Johnny, what your friend Lease has come to !"

"What I meant, Squire, was this : that I don't much think Lease will live to be tried at all."

"Not live !"

"I fancy not. Unless I am much mistaken, his life will have been claimed by its Giver long before March."

The Squire stopped and looked at Cole. "What's the matter with him ? This inflammation—that you went and testified to ?"

"That will be the cause of death, as returned to the registrar."

"Why, you speak just as if the man were dying now, Cole !"

"And I think he is. Lease has been very low in frame for a long while," added Mr. Cole ;

“half clad, and not a quarter fed. But it is not that, Squire: the heart and spirit are alike broken: and when this cold caught him, he had no stamina to withstand it; and so it has laid hold of a vital part.”

“Do you mean to tell me to my face that he will die of it?” cried the Squire, holding on by the middle button of old Cole’s great coat. “Nonsense, man! you must cure him. We—we did not want him to die, you know.”

“His life or his death, as it may be, are in the hands of One higher than I, Squire.”

“I think I’ll go in and see him,” said the Squire, meekly.

Lease was lying on a bed close to the floor when we got to the top of the creaky stairs, which had threatened to come down with the Squire’s weight and awkwardness. He had dozed off, and little Polly, sitting on the boards, had her head upon his arm. Her starting up awoke Lease. I was not in the habit of seeing dying people; but the thought struck me that Lease must be dying. His pale weary face wore the same hue that Jake’s had worn when he was dying: if you have not forgotten him.

“God bless me!” exclaimed the Squire.

Lease looked up with his sad eyes. He supposed they had come to tell him officially about the verdict—which had already reached him unofficially.

“Yes, gentlemen, I know it,” he said, trying

to get up out of respect, and falling back. "Manslaughter. I'd have been present if I could. Mr. Cole knows I wasn't able. I think God is taking me instead."

"But this won't do, you know, Lease," said the Squire. "We don't want you to die."

"Well, sir, I'm afraid I am not good for much now. And there'd be the imprisonment, and then the sentence, so that I could not work for my wife and children for some long years. When people come to know how I repented of that night's mistake, and that I have died of it, why they'll perhaps befriend them and forgive me. I think God has forgiven me : He is very merciful."

"I'll send you in some port wine and some jelly and some beef tea and some blankets, Lease," cried the Squire quickly, as if he felt flurried. "And, Lease, poor fellow, I am sorry for having been so angry with you."

"Thank you for all favours, sir, past and present. But for the help from your house my little ones would have starved. God bless you all, and forgive me ! Master Johnny, God bless *you*."

"You'll rally yet, Lease ; take heart," said the Squire.

"No, sir, I don't think so. The great dark load seems to have been lifted off me, and light to be breaking. Don't sob, Polly ! Perhaps father will be able to see you from up there as well as if he stayed here."

The first thing the Squire did when we got out, was to attack Mr. Cole, telling him he ought not to have let Lease die. As he was in a way, Cole excused it, quietly saying it was no fault of his.

"I should like to know what it is that has killed him, then?"

"Grief," said Mr. Cole. "The man has died of what we call a broken heart. Hearts don't actually sever, you know, Squire, like a china basin, and there's always some ostensible malady that serves as a hold to talk about. In this case it will be bronchitis. Which, in point of fact, is the final end, because Lease could not rally against it. He told me yesterday that his heart had ached so keenly since November, it seemed to have dried up within him."

"We are all a pack of hard-hearted sinners," groaned the Squire, in his repentance. "Johnny, why could you not have found them out sooner? Where was the use of your doing it at the eleventh hour, sir, I'd like to know?"

Harry Lease died that night. And Crabb Lane, in a fit of repentance as sudden as the Squire's, took the cost of the funeral off the parish (giving some abuse in exchange) and went in a body to the grave. I and Tod followed.

VII.

AUNT DEAN.

TIMBERDALE was a small place on the other side of Crabb Ravine. Its rector was the Rev. Jacob Lewis. Timberdale called him Parson Lewis when not on ceremony. He had married a widow, Mrs. Tanerton: she had a good deal of money and two boys, and the parish thought the new lady might be above them. But she proved kind and good; and her boys did not ride roughshod over the land or break down the farmer's fences. She died in three or four years, after a long illness.

Timberdale talked about her will, deeming it a foolish one. She left all she possessed to the rector, "in affectionate confidence," as the will worded it, "knowing he would do what was right and just by her sons." As Parson Lewis was an upright man with a conscience of his own, it was supposed he would do so; but Timberdale considered that for the boys' sake she should have made it sure herself. It was eight hundred a year, good measure.

Parson Lewis had a sister, Mrs. Dean, a widow also, who lived near Liverpool. She was

not left well off at all ; could but just make a living of it. She used to come on long visits to the parsonage, which saved her cupboard at home ; but it was said that Mrs. Lewis did not like her, thinking her deceitful, and they did not get on very well together. Parson Lewis, the meekest man in the world and most easily led, admitted to his wife that Rebecca had always been a little given to scheming, but he thought her true at heart.

When poor Mrs. Lewis was out of the way for good in Timberdale church-yard, Aunt Dean had the field to herself, and came and stayed as long as she pleased, with her child, Alice. She was a little woman with a mild face and fair skin, and had a sort of purring manner with her. Hardly speaking above her breath, and saying "dear" and "love" at every sentence, and caressing people to their faces, the rule was to fall in love with her at once. The boys, Herbert and Jack, had taken to her without question from the first, and called her "Aunt." Though she was of course no relation whatever to them.

Both the boys made much of Alice—a bright-eyed, pretty little girl with brown curls and timid, winsome ways. Herbert, who was very studious himself, helped her with her lessons : Jack, who was nearer her age, but a few months older, took her out on expeditions, hay-making and blackberrying and the like, and

would bring her home with her frock torn and her knees damaged. He told her that brave little girls never cried with him ; and the child would ignore the smart of the grazed knees and show herself as brave as a martyr. Jack was so brave and fearless himself and made so little of hurts, that she felt a kind of shame at giving way to her natural timidity when with him. What Alice liked best was to sit indoors by Herbert's side while he was at his lessons, and read story books and fairy tales. Jack was the opposite of all that, and a regular renegade in all kinds of study. He would have liked to pitch the books into the fire, and did not even care for fairy tales. They came often enough to Crabb Cot when we were there, and to our neighbours the Coneys, with whom the parsonage was intimate. I was only a little fellow at the time, years younger than they were, but I remember I liked Jack better than Herbert. As did Tod also, for the matter of that. Herbert was too clever for us, and he was to be a parson besides. He chose the calling for himself. More than once he was caught muffled in the parson's white surplice, preaching to Jack and Alice a sermon he had composed.

Aunt Dean had her plans and her plots. One great plot was always at work. She made it into a dream, and peeped into it night and day, as if it were a kaleidoscope of rich colours. Herbert Tanerton was to marry her

daughter and succeed to his mother's property as eldest son : Jack must go adrift, and earn his own living. She considered it was already three parts as good as accomplished. To see Herbert and Alice poring over books together side by side and to know that they had the same tastes, was welcome to her as the sight of gold. As to Jack, with his roving propensities and his climbing and his daring, she thought it little matter if he came down a tree head-foremost some day, or pitched neck over heels into the depths of Crabb Ravine, and so threw away his life. Not that she really wished any cruel fate for the boy ; but she did not care for him ; and he might be terribly in the way, when her foolish brother, the parson, came to apportion out the money. And he *was* foolish in some things ; soft, in fact : she often said it.

One summer day when the fruit was ripe and the sun shining, Mr. Lewis had gone into his study to write his next Sunday's sermon. He did not get on very quickly, for Aunt Dean was in there also, and it disturbed him a little. She was of a restless habit, everlastingly dusting books, and putting things in their places without need.

"Do you wish to keep out all *three* of these inkstands, Jacob ? It is not necessary, I should think. Shall I put one up ?"

The parson took his eyes off his sermon to

answer. "I don't see that they do any harm, Rebecca. The children are using two sometimes. Do as you like, however."

Mrs. Dean put one of the inkstands inside the book-case, and then looked round the room to see what else she could do. A letter caught her eye.

"Jacob, I do believe you have never answered the note old Mullet brought this morning! There it is on the mantel-piece."

The parson sighed. To be interrupted in this way he took quite as a matter of course, but it teased him a little.

"I must see the churchwardens, Rebecca, before I answer it. I want to know, you see, what would be best approved of by the parish."

"Just like you, Jacob," she caressingly said. "The parish must approve of what you approve."

"Yes, yes," he hastily said; "but I like to live at peace with everybody."

He dipped his pen into the ink, and wrote a line in his sermon. The open window looked on the kitchen-garden. Herbert Tanerton had his back against the walnut-tree, doing nothing. Alice sat near on a stool, her head buried in a book that by its canvas cover Mrs. Dean knew to be "Robinson Crusoe." Just then Jack came out of the raspberry bushes with a handful of fruit, which he held out for Alice to eat. "Robinson Crusoe" fell to the ground.

"Oh, Jack, how good they are!" said Alice. And the words came distinctly to Aunt Dean's ears in the still day.

"They are as good again when you pick them off the trees for yourself," cried Jack. "Come along and get some, Alice."

With the taste of the raspberries in her mouth, the temptation was not to be resisted; and she ran after Jack. Aunt Dean put her head out at the window.

"Alice, my love, I cannot have you go amidst those raspberry bushes; you would stain and tear your frock."

"I'll take care of her frock, aunt," called back Jack.

"My darling Jack, it cannot be. That is her new muslin frock, and she must not go where she might hurt it."

So Alice sat down again to "Robinson Crusoe," and Jack went his way amid the raspberry bushes, or whither he would.

"Jacob, have you begun to think of what John is to be?" resumed Aunt Dean, as she shut down the window.

The parson pushed his sermon from him in a kind of patient hopelessness, and turned round on his chair. "To be?—in what way, Rebecca?"

"In profession," she answered. "I fancy it is time it was thought of."

"Do you? I'm sure I don't know. The other day when something was being mentioned

about it, Jack said he did not care what he was to be, provided he had no books to trouble him."

"I only hope you will not have trouble with him, Jacob, dear," observed Mrs. Dean, in an ominous tone, that plainly intimated she thought the parson would.

"He has a good heart, though he is not so studious as his brother. Why have you shut the window, Rebecca? It is very warm."

Mrs. Dean did not say why. Perhaps she wished to guard against the conversation being heard. When any question not quite convenient to answer was put to her, she had a way of passing it by in silence; and the parson was too yielding or too inert to ask again.

"*Of course*, Brother Jacob, you will make Herbert the heir."

The parson looked surprised. "Why should you suppose that, Rebecca? I think the two boys ought to share and share alike."

"My dear Jacob, how *can* you think so? Your dead wife left you in charge, remember."

"That's what I do remember, Rebecca. She never gave me the slightest hint that she should wish a difference to be made: she was as fond of one boy as of the other."

"Jacob, you must do your duty by the boys," returned Mrs. Dean, with affectionate solemnity. "Herbert must be his mother's heir; it is right and proper it should be so: Jack must be trained to earn his own livelihood. Jack—dear

fellow !—is, I fear, of a roving, random disposition : were you to leave any portion of the money to him, he would squander it in a year.”

“Dear me, I hope not! But as to leaving all to his brother—or even a larger portion than to Jack—I don’t know that it would be right. A heavy responsibility lies on me in this charge, don’t you see, Rebecca?”

“No doubt it does. It is full eight hundred a year. And *you* must be putting something by, Jacob.”

“Not much. I draw the money yearly, but expenses seem to swallow it. What with the ponies kept for the boys, and the cost of the masters from Worcester, and a hundred a year out of it that my wife desired the poor old nurse should have till she died, there’s not a great deal left. My living is a poor one, you know, and I like to help the poor freely. When the boys go to the university it will be all wanted.”

Help the poor freely!—just like him! thought Aunt Dean.

“It would be waste of money and waste of time to send Jack to college. You should try and get him some appointment abroad, Jacob. In India, say.”

The clergyman opened his eyes at this, and said he should not like to see Jack go out of his own country. Jack’s mother had not had any opinion of foreign places. Jack himself interrupted the conversation. He came flying up the

path, put down a cabbage leaf of raspberries on the window-sill, and flung open the window with his stained fingers.

"Aunt Dean, I've picked these for you," he said, introducing the leaf, his handsome face and his good-natured eyes sparkling. "They've never been so good as they are this year. Father, you just taste them."

Aunt Dean smiled sweetly, and called him her darling, and Mr. Lewis tasted the raspberries.

"We were just talking of you, Jack," cried the unsophisticated man — and Mrs. Dean knitted her brows slightly. "Your aunt says it is time you began to think of some profession."

"What, yet awhile?" returned Jack.

"That you may be suitably educated for it, my boy."

"I should like to be something that won't want education," cried Jack, leaning his arms on the window-sill, and jumping up and down. "I think I'd rather be a farmer than anything, father."

The parson drew a long face. It had never entered into his calculation.

"I fear that would not do, Jack. I should like you to choose something higher than that; some good profession by which you may rise in the world. Herbert will go into the Church: what should you say to the Bar?"

Jack's jumping ceased all at once. "What,

to be a barrister, father? Like those be-wigged fellows that come circuit twice a year to Worcester?"

"Like that, Jack."

"But they have to study all their lives for it, father; and read up millions of books before they can pass! I couldn't do it; I couldn't indeed."

"What do you think of being a high-class lawyer, then? I might place you with some good firm, such as——"

"Don't, there's a dear father!" interrupted Jack, all the sunshine leaving his face. "I'm afraid if I were at a desk I should kick it over without knowing it: I must be running out and about.—Are they all gone, Aunt Dean? Give me the leaf to throw away, and I'll pick you some more."

The years went on. Jack was fifteen; Herbert eighteen and at Oxford: the advanced scholar had gone to college early. Aunt Dean spent quite half her time at Timberdale, from Easter till autumn, and the parson never rose against it. She let her house during her absence: it was situated on the banks of the river a little way from Liverpool, near the place they call New Brighton now. It might have been called New Brighton then for all I know. One family always took the house for the summer months, glad to get out of hot Liverpool.

As to Jack, nothing had been decided in

regard to his future, for opinions about it differed. A little Latin and a little history and a great deal of geography (for he liked that) had been drilled into him : and there his education ended. But he was the best climber and walker and leaper, and withal the best hearted young fellow that Timberdale could boast : and he knew about land thoroughly, and possessed a great stock of general and useful practical information. Many a day when some of the poorer farmers were in a desperate hurry to get in their hay or carry their wheat on account of threatening weather, has Jack Tanerton turned out to help, and toiled as hard and as long as any of the labourers. He was hail-fellow-well-met with everybody, rich and poor.

Mrs. Dean had worked on always to accomplish her ends. Slowly and imperceptibly, but surely : Herbert must be the heir ; John must shift for himself. The parson had had this dinned into him so often now, in her apparently frank and reasoning way, that he began to lend an ear. What with his strict sense of innate justice, and his habit of yielding to his sister's views, he felt mostly in a kind of pickle. But Mrs. Dean had come over this time determined to get something settled, one way or the other.

She arrived before Easter this year. The interminable Jack (as she often called him in heart) was at home ; Herbert not. Jack and

Alice did not seem to miss him, but went out on their rambles together as they did when children. The morning before Herbert was expected, a letter came from him to his step-father, saying he had been invited by a fellow-student to spend the Easter holidays at his home near London and had accepted it.

Mr. Lewis took it as a matter of course in his easy way; but it disagreed with Aunt Dean. She said all manner of things to the parson, and incited him to write for Herbert to return at once. Herbert's answer to this was a courteous intimation that he could not alter his plans; and he hoped his father, on consideration, would fail to see any good reason why he should. Herbert Tanerton had a will of his own.

"Neither do I see any reason, good or bad, why he should not pay the visit, Rebecca," confessed the rector. "I'm afraid it was foolish of me to object at all. Perhaps I have not the right to deny him, either, if I wished it. He is getting on for nineteen, and I am not his own father."

So Aunt Dean had to make the best and the worst of it; but she felt as cross as two sticks.

One day when the parson was abroad on parish matters, and the Rectory empty, she went out for a stroll, and reached the high steep bank where the primroses and violets grew.

Looking over, she saw Jack and Alice seated below ; Jack's arm round her waist.

" You are to be my wife, you know, Alice, when we are grown up. Mind that."

There was no answer, but Aunt Dean certainly thought she heard the sound of a kiss. Peeping over again, she saw Jack taking another.

" And if you don't object to my being a farmer, Alice, I should like it best of all. We'll keep two jolly ponies and ride about together. Won't it be good ! "

" I don't object to farming, Jack. Anything you like. A successful farmer's home is a very pleasant one."

Aunt Dean drew away with noiseless steps. She was too calm and callous a woman to turn white ; but she did turn angry, and registered a vow in her heart. That presuming, upstart Jack ! They were but two little fools, it's true ; no better than children ; but the nonsense must be stopped in time.

Herbert went back to Oxford without coming home. Alice, to her own infinite astonishment, was despatched to school till midsummer. The parson and his sister and Jack were left alone ; and Aunt Dean, with her soft smooth manner and her false expressions of endearment, ruled all things ; her brother's better nature amid the rest.

Jack was asked what he would be. A farmer, he answered. But Aunt Dean had somehow

caught up the most bitter notions possible against farming in general; and Mr. Lewis, not much liking the thing himself, and yielding to the under-current ever gently flowing, told Jack he must fix on something else.

"There's nothing I shall do so well at as farming, father," remonstrated Jack. "You can put me for three or four years to some good agriculturist, and I'll be bound at the end of the time I should be fit to manage the largest and best farm in the country. Why, I am a better farmer now than some of them are."

"Jack, my boy, you must not be self-willed. I cannot let you be a farmer."

"Then send me to sea, father, and make a sailor of me," returned Jack, with undisturbed good humour.

But this startled the parson. He liked Jack, and he had a horror of the sea. "Not that, Jack, my boy. Anything but that."

"I'm not sure but I should like the sea better than farming," went on Jack, the idea full in his head. "Aunt Dean lent me 'Peter Simple' one day. I know I should make a first-rate sailor."

"Jack, don't talk so. Your poor mother would not have liked it, and I don't like it; and I shall never let you go."

"Some fellows run away to sea," said Jack, laughing.

The parson felt as though a bucket of cold water was thrown down his back. Did Jack mean that as a threat?

“John,” said he, in as solemn a way as he had ever spoken, “disobedience to parents sometimes brings a curse with it. You must promise me that you will never go to sea.”

“I’ll not promise that, off hand,” said Jack. “But I will promise never to go without your consent. Think it over well, father; there’s no hurry.”

It was on the tip of Mr. Lewis’s tongue to withdraw his objection to the farming scheme there and then: in comparison with the other it looked quite fair and bright. But he thought he might compromise his judgment to yield thus instantly: and, as easy Jack said, there was no hurry.

So Jack went rushing out of doors again to the uttermost bounds of the parish, and the parson was left to Aunt Dean. When he told her he meant to let Jack be a farmer, she laughed till the tears came into her eyes, and begged him to leave matters to her. *She* knew how to manage boys, without appearing directly to cross them: there was this kind of trouble with most boys, she had observed, before they settled satisfactorily in life, but it all came right in the end.

So the parson said no more about farming: but Jack talked a great deal about the sea. Mr.

Lewis went over in his gig to Worcester, and bought a book he had heard of, "Two Years before the Mast." He wrote Jack's name in it and gave it him, hoping its contents might serve to sicken him of the sea.

The next morning the book was missing. Jack looked high and low for it, but it was gone. He had left it on the sitting-room table when he went up to bed, and it mysteriously disappeared during the night. The servants had not seen it, and declared it was not on the table in the morning.

"It could not—I suppose—have been the cat," observed Aunt Dean, in a doubtful manner, her eyes full of wonder as to where the book could have got to. "I have heard of cats doing strange things."

"I don't think the cat would make away with a book of that size, Rebecca," said the parson. And if he had not been the least suspicious parson in all the Worcester Diocese, he might have asked his sister whether *she* had been the cat, and secured the book lest it should serve to dissipate Jack's fancy for the sea.

The next thing she did was to carry Jack off to Liverpool. The parson objected at first: Liverpool was a seaport town, and might put Jack more in mind of the sea than ever. Aunt Dean replied that she meant him to see the worst sides of a sea life, the dirty boats in the Mersey, the wretchedness of the crews, and the

real discomfort and misery of a sailor's life. That would cure him, she said: what he had got in his head now was the romance picked up from books. The parson thought there was reason in this, and yielded. He was dreadfully anxious about Jack.

She went straight to her house near New Brighton, Jack with her, and a substantial sum in her pocket from the rector to pay Jack's keep. The old servant, Peggy, who took care of it, was thunderstruck to see her mistress come in. It was not yet occupied by the Liverpool people, and Mrs. Dean sent them word they could not have it this year: at least not for the present. While she got matters straight, she supplied Jack with all Captain Marryat's novels to read. The house looked on the river, and Jack would watch the fine grand vessels starting on their long voyages, their trim white sails glowing fair in the sunshine, or hear the joyous shouts from the sailors of a homeward bound ship as Liverpool hove in view; and he grew to think there was no sight so pleasant to the eye as these beauteous ships; no fate so desirable as to sail in them.

But Aunt Dean had entirely changed her tactics. Instead of sending Jack on to the dirtiest and worst managed boats in the docks, where the living was hard and the sailors were discontented, she allowed him to roam at will on the finest ships, and make acquaintance with

their enthusiastic young officers, especially with those who were going to sea for the first time with just such notions as Jack's. Before midsummer came, Jack Tanerton had got to think that he could never be happy on land.

There was a new ship just launched, the *Rose of Delhi*; a magnificent vessel. Jack took rare interest in her. He was for ever on board; was for ever saying to her owners—friends of Aunt Dean's, to whom she had introduced him—how much he should like to sail in her. The owners thought it would be an advantageous thing to get so active, open, and ready a lad into their service, although he was somewhat old for entering, and they offered to article him for four years, as "midshipman" on the *Rose of Delhi*. Jack went home with his tale, his eyes glowing; and Aunt Dean neither checked him nor helped him.

Not *then*. Later, when the ship was all but ready to sail, she told Jack she washed her hands of it, and recommended him to write and ask his stepfather whether he might sail in her, or not.

Now Jack was no letter writer; neither, truth to tell, was the parson. He had not once written home; but had contented himself with sending affectionate messages in Aunt Dean's letters. Consequently, Mr. Lewis only knew what Aunt Dean had chosen to tell him, and

had no idea that Jack was getting the real sea fever. But at the suggestion Jack sat down now, and wrote a long letter.

Its purport was this. That he was longing and hoping to go to sea ; was sure he should never like anything else in the world so well ; that the *Rose of Delhi*, Captain Druce, was the most magnificent ship ever launched ; that the owners bore the best character in Liverpool for liberality, and Captain Druce for kindness to his middies ; and that he hoped, oh he hoped, his father would let him go ; but that if he still refused, he (Jack) would do his best to be content to stay on shore, for he did not forget his promise of never sailing without consent.

“ Would you like to see the letter, Aunt Dean, before I shut it up ? ” he asked.

Aunt Dean, who had been sitting by, took the letter, and privately thought it was as good a letter and as much to the purpose as the best scribe in the land could have written. She disliked it, for all that.

“ Jack, dear, I think you had better put a postscript,” she said. “ Your father detests writing, as you know. Tell him that if he consents he need not write any answer : you will know what it means,—that you may go,—and it will save him trouble.”

“ But, Aunt Dean, I should like him to wish me good-bye and God speed.”

“ He will be sure to do the one in his heart

and the other in his prayers, my boy. Write your postscript."

Jack did as he was bid: he was as docile as his stepfather. Exactly as Mrs. Dean suggested, wrote he: and he added that if no answer arrived within two posts, he should take it for granted that he was to go, and should see about his outfit. There was no time to lose, for the ship would sail in three or four days.

"I will post it for you, Jack," she said, when it was ready. "I am going out."

"Thank you, Aunt Dean, but I can post it myself. I'd rather; and then I shall know it's off. Oh, sha'n't I be on thorns till the time for an answer comes and goes!"

He snatched his cap and vaulted off with the letter before he could be stopped. Aunt Dean had a curious look on her face, and sat biting her lips. She had not intended the letter to go.

The first post that could possibly bring an answer brought one. Jack was not at home. Aunt Dean had sent him out on an early commission, watched for the postman, and hastened to the door herself to receive what he might bring. He brought two letters—as it chanced. One from the Rector of Timberdale; one from Alice Dean. Mrs. Dean locked the one up in her private drawer above stairs: the other she left on the breakfast table.

"Peggy says the postman has been here,

“aunt!” cried the boy, all excitement, as he ran in.

“Yes, dear. He brought a letter from Alice.”

“And nothing from Timberdale?”

“Well, I don’t know that you could quite expect it by this post, Jack. Your father might like to take a little time for consideration. You may read Alice’s letter, my boy: she comes home this day week for the summer holidays.”

“Not till this day week!” cried Jack, in frightful disappointment. “Why, I shall have sailed then, if I go, Aunt Dean! I shall not see her.”

“Well, dear, you will see her when you come home.”

Aunt Dean had no more commissions for Jack after that, and each time the postman was expected, he posted himself outside the door to wait for him. The man brought no other letter. The reasonable time for an answer went by, and there came none.

“Aunt Dean, I suppose I may get my outfit now,” said Jack, only half satisfied. “But I wish I had told him to write in any case: just a line.”

“According to what you said, you know, Jack, silence must be taken to give consent.”

“Yes, I know. I’d rather have had a word, and made certain. I wish there was time for me just to run over to Timberdale and see him!”

“But there’s not, Jack, more’s the pity: you would lose the ship. Get a piece of paper and make out a list of the articles the second mate told you you would want.”

The *Rose of Delhi* sailed out of port for Calcutta, and John Tanerton with her, having signed articles to serve in her for four years. The night before his departure he wrote a short letter of farewell to his stepfather, thanking him for his tacit consent, and promising to do his best to get on, concluding it with love to himself and to Herbert, and to the Rectory servants. Which letter somehow got put into Aunt Dean’s kitchen fire, and never reached Timberdale.

Aunt Dean watched the *Rose of Delhi* sail by; Jack, in his bran-new uniform, waving his last farewells to her with his gold-banded cap. The sigh of relief she heaved when the fine vessel was out of sight seemed to do her good. Then she bolted herself into her chamber, and opened Mr. Lewis’s letter, which had lain untouched till then. As she expected, it contained a positive interdiction, written half sternly, half lovingly, for John to sail in the *Rose of Delhi*, or to think more of the sea. Moreover, it commanded him home at once, and it contained a promise that he should be placed to learn the farming without delay. Aunt Dean tripped to Peggy’s fire and burnt that too.

There was a dreadful fuss when Jack’s

departure became known at Timberdale. It fell upon the parson like a thunderbolt. He came striding through the ravine to Crabb Cot, and burst out crying while telling the news to the Squire. He feared he had failed somehow in bringing John up, he said, or he never would have repaid him with this base disobedience and ingratitude. For, you see, the poor man thought Jack had received his letter, and gone off in defiance of it. The Squire agreed with him that Jack deserved the cat-o'-nine tails, and all other boys who traitorously decamped to sea.

Before the hay was all got in, Aunt Dean was back at Timberdale, bringing Alice with her and the bills for the outfit. She let the parson think what he would about Jack, ignoring all knowledge of the letter, and affecting to believe that Jack could not have had it. But the parson argued that Jack must have had it, and did have it, or it would have come back to him. The only one to say a good word for Jack was Alice. She persisted in an opinion that Jack could not be either disobedient or ungrateful, and that there must have been some strange mistake somewhere.

Aunt Dean's work was not all done. She took the poor parson under her wing, and proved to him that he had no resource now but to disinherit Jack, and make Herbert the entire heir. To leave money to Jack would be wanton

waste, she urged, for he would be sure to squander it: better bequeath all to Herbert, who would of course look after his brother in later life, and help him if he needed help. So one of the Worcester solicitors, Mr. Hill, was sent for to Timberdale to receive instructions for making the parson's will in Herbert's favour, and to cut off Jack.

That night, after Mr. Hill had gone back again, was one of the worst the parson had ever spent. He was a just man and a kind one, and he felt racked with fear lest he had taken too severe a measure, and one that his late wife, the true owner of the money and John's mother, would never have sanctioned. His bed was as a fever, his pillow a torment; up he got, and walked the room in his night-shirt.

"My Lord and God knoweth that I would do what is right," he groaned. "I am sorely troubled. Youth is vain and desperately thoughtless; perhaps the boy, in his love of adventure, never looked at the step in the light of ingratitude. I cannot cut him quite off; I should never find peace of mind if I did. He shall have a little; and perhaps if he grows into a steady fellow and comes back what he ought to be, I may alter the will later and leave them equal."

The next day the parson wrote privately to Mr. Hill, saying he had reconsidered his deter-

mination and would let Jack inherit to the extent of a hundred and fifty pounds a year.

Herbert came home for the long vacation ; and he and Alice were together as they had been before that upstart Jack stepped in. They often came to the Squire's and oftener to the Coneys'. Crace Coney, a niece of old Coney, had come to live at the farm ; she was a nice girl, and she and Alice liked each other. You might see them with Herbert strolling about the fields any hour in the day. At home Alice and Herbert seemed never to care to separate. Mrs. Dean watched them quietly, and thought how beautifully her plans had worked.

Aunt Dean did not go home till October. After she left, the parson had a stroke of paralysis. Charles Ashton, then just ordained to priest's orders, took the duty. Mrs. Dean came back again for Christmas. As if she would let Alice stay away from the parsonage when Herbert was at home !

The Rose of Delhi did not come back for nearly two years. She was what is called a free ship, and took charters for any place she could make money by. One day Alice Dean was leaning out of the windows of her mother's house, gazing wistfully on the sparkling sea, when a grand and stately vessel came sailing homewards, and some brown-faced young fellow on the quarter deck set on to swing his cap

violently by way of hailing her. She looked to the flag which happened to be flying, and read the name there, "The Rose of Delhi." It must be Jack who was saluting. Alice burst into tears of emotion.

He came up from the docks the same day. A great brown handsome fellow with the old single heart and open manners. And he clasped Alice in his arms and kissed her ever so many times before she could get free. Being a grown-up young lady now, she did not approve of unceremonious kissing, and told Jack so. Aunt Dean was not present, or she might have told him so more to the purpose.

Jack had given satisfaction, and was getting on. He told Alice privately that he did not like the sea so much as he anticipated, and could not believe how any other fellow did; but as he had chosen it as his calling, he meant to stand by it. He went to Timberdale, in spite of Aunt Dean's advice and efforts to keep him away. Herbert was absent, she said, the rector ill and childish. Jack found it all too true. Mr. Lewis's mind had failed and his health was breaking. He knew Jack and was over-affectionate with him, but seemed not to remember anything of the past. So never a word did Jack hear of his own disobedience, or of any missing letters.

One person alone questioned him; and that was Alice. It was after he got back from

Timberdale. She asked him to tell her the history of his sailing in the *Rose of Delhi*, and he gave it in detail, without reserve. When he spoke of the postscript that Aunt Dean had bade him add to his letter, arranging that silence should be taken for consent, and that as no answer had come, he of course had so taken it, the girl turned sick and faint. She saw the treachery that had been at work and where it had lain; but for her mother's sake she hushed it up and let the matter pass. Alice had not lived with her mother so many years without detecting her propensity for deceit.

Some years passed by. Jack got on well. He served as third mate on the *Rose of Delhi* long before he could pass, by law, for second. He was made second mate as soon as he had passed for it. The *Rose of Delhi* came in and went out, and Jack stayed by her, and passed for first mate in course of time. He was not sent back in any of his examinations, as most young sailors are, and the board once went the length of complimenting him on his answers. The fact was, Jack held to his word of doing his best; he got into no mischief and was the smartest sailor afloat. He was in consequence a favourite with the owners, and Captain Druce took pains with him and brought him on in seamanship and navigation, and showed him how to take observations, and all the rest of it.

There's no end of difference in merchant-captains in this respect: some teach their junior officers nothing. Jack finally passed triumphantly for master, and hoped his time would come to get a command. Meanwhile he went out again as first mate on the *Rose of Delhi*.

One spring morning there came news to Mrs. Dean from Timberdale. The rector had had another stroke and was thought to be near his end. She started off at once, with Alice. Charles Ashton had had a living given to him; and Herbert Tanerton was now his stepfather's curate. Herbert had passed as shiningly in mods and divinity and all the rest of it as Jack had passed before the marine board. He was a steady, thoughtful, serious young man, did his duty well in the parish, and preached better sermons than ever the rector had. Mrs. Dean, who looked upon him as Alice's husband as surely as though they were married, was as proud of his success as though it had been her own.

The rector was very ill and unable to leave his bed. His intellect was quite gone now. Mrs. Dean sat with him most of the day, leaving Alice to be taken care of by Herbert. They went about together just as always, and were on the best of confidential terms; and came over to the Coneys', and to us when we were at Crabb Cot.

"Herbert," said Mrs. Dean one evening when she had all her soft, sugary manner upon her and was making the young parson believe she had nobody's interest at heart in the world but his: "my darling boy, is it not almost time you began to think of marriage? None know the happiness and comfort brought by a good wife, dear, until they experience it."

Herbert looked taken to. He turned as red as a school-girl, and glanced half a moment at Alice, like a detected thief.

"I must wait until I get a living to think of that, Aunt Dean."

"Is it necessary, Herbert? I should have thought you might bring a wife home to the Rectory here."

Herbert turned off the subject with a jesting word or two, and got out of his redness. Aunt Dean was eminently satisfied; his confusion and his impromptu glance at Alice had told tales; and she knew it was only a question of time.

The rector died. When the grass was long and the May flowers were in bloom and the cuckoo was singing in the trees, he passed peacefully to his Rest. Just before death he recovered speech and consciousness; but the chief thing he said was that he left his love to Jack.

After the funeral the will was opened. It had not been touched since that far past year when Jack had gone away to sea. Out of the

eight hundred a year descended from their mother Jack had a hundred and fifty; Herbert the rest. Aunt Dean made a hideous frown for once in her life; a hundred and fifty pounds a year for Jack, was only, as she looked upon it, so much robbery on Herbert and Alice. Out of the little money saved by the rector, five hundred pounds were left to his sister, Rebecca Dean; the rest was to be divided equally between Herbert and Jack; and his furniture and effects went to Herbert. On the whole, Aunt Dean was tolerably satisfied.

She was a woman who liked to keep up appearances strictly, and she made a move to leave the young parson at the end of a week or two's time, and go back to Liverpool. Herbert did not detain her. His own course was uncertain until a fresh rector should be appointed. The living was in the gift of a neighbouring baronet, and it was fancied by some that he might give it to Herbert. One thing did surprise Mrs. Dean; angered her too: that Herbert had not made his offer to Alice before their departure. Now that he had his own fortune at command, there was no necessity for him to wait for a living.

News greeted them on their arrival. The Rose of Delhi was on her way home once more, with John Tanerton in command. Captain Druce had been left behind at Calcutta, dangerously ill. Alice's colour came and went.

She looked out for the homeward-bound vessels passing inwards, and felt quite sick with anxiety lest Jack should fail in any way, and never bring home the ship.

"The Rose of Delhi, Captain Tanerton." Alice Dean cast her eyes on the ship news in the morning paper, and read the announcement amidst the arrivals. Just for an instant her sight left her.

"Mamma," she presently said, quietly passing over the newspaper, "the Rose of Delhi is in."

"The Rose of Delhi, Captain Tanerton," read Mrs. Dean. "The idea of their sticking in Jack's name as Captain! He will have to go down again as soon as Captain Druce returns. A fine captain I daresay he has made!"

"At least he has brought the ship home safely and quickly," Alice ventured to say. "It must have passed after dark last night."

"Why after dark?"

Alice did not reply. Because I was watching till daylight faded—which would have been the truth. "Had it passed before, some of us might have seen it, mamma."

The day was waning before Jack came up. Captain Tanerton. Jack was never to go back again to his chief-mateship, as Aunt Dean had surmised, for the owners had given him the permanent command of the Rose of Delhi. The last mail had brought news from Captain

Druce that he should never be well enough for the command again, and the owners were only glad to give it to the younger and more active man. The officers and crew alike reported that never a better master sailed, than Jack had proved himself on this homeward voyage.

"Don't you think I have been very lucky on the whole, Aunt Dean? Fancy a young fellow like me getting such a beautiful ship as that!"

"Oh, very lucky," returned Aunt Dean.

Jack looked like a captain too. He was broad and manly, with an intelligent, honest, handsome face, and the quick keen eye of a sailor. Jack was particular in his attire too: and some sailors are not: he dressed as a private gentleman when on shore.

"Only a hundred and fifty left to me!" cried Jack, when he was told the news. "Well, perhaps Herbert may require more than I, poor fellow," he added in his good nature; "he may not get a good living, and then he'll be glad of it. I shall be sure to do well now I've got the ship."

"You'll be at sea always, Jack, and will have no use for money," said Mrs Dean.

"Oh, I don't know about having no use for it, aunt. Anyway, my father thought it right to leave it so, and I am content. I wish I could have said farewell to him before he died!"

A few days more, and Aunt Dean was thrown on her beam-ends at a worse angle than ever

the Rose of Delhi hoped to be. Jack and Alice discussed matters between themselves, and the result was disclosed to her. They were going to be married.

It was Alice who told. Jack had just left, and she and her mother were sitting together in the summer twilight. At first Mrs. Dean thought Alice was joking: she was like a mad woman when she found it true. Her great dream had never foreshadowed this.

"How dare you to attempt to think of so monstrous a thing, you wicked girl? Marry your own brother-in-law!—it would be no better. It is Herbert that is to be your husband."

Alice shook her head with a smile. "Herbert would not have me, mamma; nor would I have him. Herbert will marry Grace Coney."

"Who?" cried Mrs. Dean.

"Grace Coney. They have been in love with one another ever so many years. I have known it all along. He will marry her as soon as his future is settled. I had promised to be one of the bridesmaids, but I suppose I shall not get the chance now."

"Grace Coney—that beggarly girl!" shrieked Mrs. Dean. "But for her uncle's giving her shelter she must have turned out in the world when her father died and got her living how she could. She is not a lady. She is not Herbert's equal."

"Oh, yes, she is, mamma. She is a nice

girl and will make him a perfect wife. Herbert would not exchange her for the richest lady in the land."

"If Herbert chooses to make a spectacle of himself, you never shall!" cried poor Mrs. Dean, all her golden visions fast melting into air. "I would see that wicked Jack Tanerton at the bottom of the sea first."

"Mother, dear, listen to me. Jack and I have cared for each other for years and years, and we should neither of us marry anybody else. There is nothing to wait for; Jack is as well off as he will be for years to come: and—and we have settled it so, and I hope you will not oppose it."

It was a cruel moment for Aunt Dean. Her love for other people had been all pretence, but she did love her daughter. Besides that, she was ambitious for her.

"I can never let you marry a sailor, Alice. Anything but that."

"It was you who made Jack a sailor, mother, and there's no help for it," said Alice, in a low tone. "I would rather he had been anything else in the world. I would have liked him to have had land and farmed it. We should have done well. Jack had his four hundred a year clear, you know. At least, he ought to have had it. Oh, mother, don't you see that while you have been plotting against Jack you have plotted against me?"

Aunt Dean felt sick with the memories that were crowding upon her. The mistake she had made was a frightful one.

"You cannot join your fate to Jack's, Alice," she repeated, wringing her hands. "A sailor's wife is too liable to be made a widow."

"I know it, mother. I shall share his danger, for I am going out in the *Rose of Delhi*. The owners have consented, and Jack is fitting up a lovely little cabin for me that is to be my own saloon."

"My daughter sailing over the seas in a merchant ship!" gasped Aunt Dean. "Never!"

"I should be no true wife if I could let my husband sail without me. Mother, it is you alone who have carved out our destiny. Better have left it to God."

In a startled way, her heart full of remorse, she was beginning to see it; and sat down, half fainting, on a chair.

"It is a miserable prospect, Alice."

"Mother, we shall get on. There's the hundred and fifty a year certain, you know. That we shall put by; and, as long as I sail with him, a good deal more besides. Jack's pay is fixed at twenty pounds a month, and he will make more by commission: perhaps as much again. Have no fear for us on that score. Jack has been deprived unjustly of his birthright; and I think sometimes that

perhaps as a recompense Heaven will prosper him."

"But the danger, Alice! The danger of a sea-life!"

"Do you know what Jack says about the danger, mother? He says God is over us on the sea as well as on the land and will take care of those who put their trust in Him. In the wildest storm I will try to let that great truth help me to feel peace."

Alas for Aunt Dean! The arguments slipped away from her hands just as her plans had slipped. In her bitter repentance, she lay on the floor of her room that night and asked God to have pity upon her, for her trouble seemed greater than she could bear.

The morning's post brought news from Herbert. He was made Rector of Timberdale. Aunt Dean wrote back, telling him what had taken place, and asking, nay, almost commanding, that he should restore an equal share of the property to Jack. Herbert replied that he should abide by his stepfather's will. The living of Timberdale was not a rich one, and he wished Grace, his future wife, to be comfortable. "Herbert was always intensely selfish," groaned Aunt Dean. Look on which side she would, there was no comfort.

The Rose of Delhi, Captain Tanerton, sailed out of port again, carrying also with her Mrs. Tanerton, the captain's wife. And Aunt Dean

was left to bemoan her fate, and wish she had never meddled to shape out other people's destinies. Better, as Alice said, that she had left that to God.

VIII.

GOING THROUGH THE TUNNEL.

WE had to make a rush for it. And making a rush did not suit the Squire, any more than it does other people who have come to an age when the body's big and the breath nowhere. He reached the train, pushed head-foremost into a carriage, and then remembered the tickets. "Bless my heart!" he exclaimed, as he jumped out again, and nearly upset a lady who had a little dog in her arms, and a great big mass of fashionable hair on her head, that the Squire, in his hurry, mistook for tow.

"Plenty of time, sir," said a guard who was passing. "There's three minutes to spare."

Instead of saying he was obliged to the man for his civility, or relieved to find the tickets might be had still, the Squire snatched out his old watch, and began abusing the railway clocks for being slow. Had Tod been there he would have told him to his face that it was the watch that was fast, braving all retort, for the Squire believed in his watch as he did in himself, and would rather have been told that *he* could go

wrong than that the watch could. But there was only me: and I'd not have said it for anything.

"Keep two back-seats there, Johnny," said the Squire.

I put my coat on the corner-seat furthest from the door, and the rug on the one next to it, and followed him into the station. When the Squire was late in starting, he was apt to get into the greatest flurry conceivable; and the first thing I saw was himself blocking up the ticket-place, and undoing his pocket-book with twitching fingers. He had some loose gold about him, silver too, but the pocket-book met his hand first, so he pulled out that. These flurried moments of the Squire's amused Tod beyond telling; he was so cool himself.

"Can you change this?" said the Squire, drawing out one from a roll of five-pound notes.

"No, I can't," was the answer, in the surly tone put on by ticket-clerks.

How the Squire crumpled up the note again, and searched in his breeches pocket for the gold, and came away with the two tickets and the change, I'm sure he never knew. There was a crowd gathered round, wanting to take their tickets in turn, and the knowledge that he was keeping them flurried him all the more. He stood at the back a moment, put the roll of notes into his case, fastened it and returned it

to the breast of his over-coat, sent the change down into another pocket without counting it, and went out with the tickets in his hand. Not to the carriage; but to take a stare at the big clock in front.

"Don't you see, Johnny? exactly four minutes and a half difference," he cried, holding out his watch to me. "It is a strange thing they can't keep these railway clocks in order."

"My watch keeps good time, sir, and mine is with the railway. I think it is right."

"Hold your tongue, Johnny. How dare you! Right! You send your watch to be regulated the first opportunity, sir; don't *you* get into the habit of being too late or too early."

When we went finally to the carriage there were some people in it, but our seats were left. Squire Todhetley sat down by the further door, and settled himself and his coats and his things comfortably, which he had been too flurried to do before. Cool as a cucumber was he, now the bustle was over; cool as Tod could have been. At the other door, with his face to the engine, sat a dark, gentlemanly-looking man of forty, who had made room for us to pass him as we got in. He had a large signet-ring on one hand, and a lavender glove on the other. The other three seats opposite to us were vacant. Next to me sat a little man with a fresh colour and

gold spectacles, who was already reading ; and beyond him, in the corner, face to face with the dark man, was a lunatic. That's to speak of him politely. Of all the restless, fidgety, worrying, hot-tempered passengers that ever put themselves into a carriage to travel with people in their senses, he was the worst. In fifteen moments he had made fifteen darts ; now after his hat-box and things above his head ; now calling the guard and the porters to ask senseless questions about his luggage ; now treading on our toes, and trying the corner seat opposite the Squire, and then darting back to his own. His hair was a wig, and had a decided green tinge, the effect of keeping, perhaps, and his skin was dry and shrivelled as an Egyptian mummy's.

A servant, in undress livery, came to the door, and touched his hat, which had a cockade in it, as he spoke to the dark man.

“ Your ticket, my lord.”

Lords are not travelled with every day, and some of us looked up. The gentleman took the ticket from the man's hand and slipped it into his waistcoat pocket.

“ You can get me a newspaper, Wilkins. The *Times*, if it is to be had.”

“ Yes, my lord.”

“ Yes, there's room here, ma'am,” interrupted the guard, sending the door back with a click, for a lady who stood at it. “ Make haste, please.”

The lady who stepped in was the same the Squire had bolted against. She sat down in the seat opposite me, and looked at every one of us by turns. There was a kind of violet bloom on her face and some soft white powder, seen plain enough through her veil. She took the longest gaze at the dark gentleman, bending a little forward to do it; for, as he was in a line with her, and had his head turned from her as well, her curiosity could only get a view of his side-face. Mrs. Todhetley might have said she had not put on her company manners. In the midst of this, the servant-man came back again.

“The *Times* is not here yet, my lord. They are expecting the papers in by the next down train.”

“Never mind, then. You can get me one at the next station, Wilkins.”

“Very well, my lord.”

Wilkins must certainly have had a scramble for his carriage, for we started before he had well left the door. It was not an express-train, and we should have to stop at several stations. Where the Squire and I had been staying does not matter; it has nothing to do with what I have to tell. It was a long way from our own home, and that's enough to say.

“Would you mind changing seats with me, sir?”

I looked up, to find the lady's face close to

mine ; she had spoken in a half-whisper. The Squire, who carried his old-fashioned notions of politeness with him when he went travelling, at once got up to offer her the corner. But she declined it, saying she was subject to face-ache, and did not care to be next the window. So she took my seat, and I sat down in the one opposite Mr. Todhetley.

“ Which of the peers is that ? ” I heard her ask him in a loud whisper, as the lord put his head out at his window.

“ Don’t know at all, ma’am,” said the Squire. “ Don’t know many of the peers myself, except those of my own county : Lyttelton, and Beauchamp, and——”

Of all snarling barks, the worst was given that moment in the Squire’s face, stopping the list suddenly. The little dog, an ugly, hairy, vile-tempered Scotch terrier, had been held in concealment under the lady’s jacket, and now struggled himself free. The Squire’s look of consternation was good ! You see, he had not known any animal was there.

“ Be quiet, Wasp. How dare you bark at the gentleman ? He will not bite, sir : he——”

“ Who has got a dog in the carriage ? ” shrieked out the lunatic, starting up in a passion. “ Dogs don’t travel with passengers. Here ! Guard ! Guard ! ”

To call out for the guard when a train is going at full speed is generally useless. The

lunatic had to sit down again ; and the lady defied him, so to say, coolly avowing that she had hid the dog from the guard on purpose, staring him in the face while she said it.

After this there was a lull, and we went speeding along, the lady talking now and again to the Squire. She seemed to want to get confidential with him ; but the Squire did not seem to care for it, though he was quite civil. She held the dog in her lap amidst her clothes, so that nothing but his head peeped out.

“ Halloa ! How dare they be so negligent ? There’s no lamp in this carriage.”

It was the lunatic again, and we all looked at the lamp. It had no light in it ; but that it *had* when we first reached the carriage was certain ; for, as the Squire went stumbling in, his head nearly touched the lamp, and I had noticed the flame. It seems the Squire had also.

“ They must have put it out while we were getting our tickets,” he said.

“ I’ll know the reason why when we stop,” cried the lunatic, fiercely. “ After passing the next station, we dash into the long tunnel. The idea of going through it in pitch-darkness ! It would not be safe.”

“ Especially with a dog in the carriage,” spoke the lord, in a chaffing kind of tone, but with a good-natured smile. “ We will have the lamp lighted, however.”

As if to reward him for interference, the dog barked up loudly, and tried to make a spring at him; upon which the lady smothered the animal up, head and all.

Another minute or two, and the train began to slacken its speed. It was but an insignificant station, one not likely to be halted at for above a minute. The lunatic twisted his body out at the window, and shouted for the guard long before we were at a standstill.

"Allow me to manage this," said the lord, quietly putting him down. "They know me on the line. Wilkins!"

The man came rushing up at the call. He must have been out already, though we were not quite at a stand-still yet.

"Is it for the *Times*, my lord? I am going to get it?"

"Never mind the *Times*. This lamp is not lighted, Wilkins. See the guard, and *get it done*. At once."

"And ask him what the mischief he means by his carelessness," roared out the lunatic in the wake of Wilkins, who went flying off. "Sending us on our road without a light!—and that dangerous tunnel close at hand."

The emphatic authority laid upon the words "Get it done," seemed an earnest that the speaker was accustomed to be obeyed at will, and would be this time. For once the lunatic sat quiet, watching the lamp, and for the light

that was to be dropped into it from the top ; and so did I, and so did the lady. We were all deceived, however, and the train went puffing on. The lunatic shrieked, the lord put his head out of the carriage and shouted for Wilkins.

No good. Shouting after a train is off never is much good. The lord sat down on his seat again, an angry frown crossing his face, and the lunatic got up and danced on his legs.

"I do not know where the blame lies," observed the lord. "Not with my servant, I think : he is attentive, and has been with me some years."

"I'll know where it lies," retorted the lunatic. "I am a director on the line, though I don't often travel on it. This is management, this is ! A few minutes more, and we shall be in the dark tunnel."

"Of course it would have been satisfactory to have a light ; but it is not of so much consequence," said the nobleman, wishing to soothe him. "There's no danger in the dark."

"No danger ! No danger, sir ! I think there is danger. Who's to know that dog won't spring out and bite us ? Who's to know there won't be an accident in mid-tunnel ? A light is a protection against having our pockets picked, if it's a protection against nothing else."

"I fancy our pockets are pretty safe to-day,"

said the lord, glancing round at us with a good-natured smile ; as much as to say that none of us looked like thieves. " And I certainly trust we shall get through the tunnel in safety."

" And I'll take care the dog does not bite you in the dark," spoke up the lady, pushing her head forward to give the lunatic a nod or two that you'd hardly have matched for defiant impudence. " You'll be good, won't you, Wasp ! But I should like the lamp lighted myself. You will perhaps be so kind, my lord, as to see that there's no mistake made about it at the next station !"

He slightly raised his hat to her and bowed in answer, but did not speak. The lunatic buttoned up his coat with fingers that were either nervous or angry, and then disturbed the little gentleman next him, who had read his big book throughout the whole commotion without once lifting his eyes, by hunting everywhere for his pocket-handkerchief.

" Here's the tunnel !" he cried out resentfully, as we dashed with a shriek into pitch-darkness.

It was all very well for her to say she would take care of the dog, but the first thing the young beast did was to make a spring at me and then at the Squire, barking and yelping frightfully. The Squire pushed it away in a commotion. Though well accustomed to dogs, he always fought shy of strange ones. The lady chattered and laughed, and did not seem to

try to get hold of him, but we couldn't see, you know ; the Squire hissed at him, the dog snarled and growled ; altogether there was noise enough to deafen anything but a tunnel.

"Pitch him out at the window," cried the lunatic.

"Pitch yourself out," answered the lady. And whether she propelled the dog, or whether he went of his own accord, the beast sprang to the other end of the carriage, and was seized upon by the nobleman.

"I think, madam, you had better put him under your mantle and keep him there," said he, bringing the dog back to her and speaking quite civilly, but in the same tone of authority he had used to his servant about the lamp. "I have not the slightest objection to dogs myself, but many people have, and it is not altogether pleasant to have them loose in a railway carriage. I beg your pardon ; I cannot see ; is this your hand ?"

It was her hand, I suppose, for the dog was left with her, and he went back to his seat again. When we emerged out of the tunnel into the light of day, the lunatic's face was blue.

"Ma'am, if that miserable brute had laid hold of me by so much as the corner of my great-coat tail, I'd have had the law of you. It is perfectly monstrous that anybody, putting themselves into a first-class carriage, should attempt

to outrage railway laws, and upset the comfort of travellers with impunity. I shall complain to the guard."

"He does not bite, sir; he never bites," she softly answered, as if sorry for the escapade, and wishing to conciliate him. "The poor little bijou is frightened at darkness, and leaped from my arms unawares. There! I'll promise that you shall neither see nor hear him again."

She had tucked the dog so completely out of sight, that no one could have suspected one was there, just as it had been on first entering. The train was drawn up to the next station; when it stopped, the servant came and opened the carriage-door for his master to get out.

"Did you understand me, Wilkins, when I told you to get this lamp lighted?"

"My lord, I'm very sorry; I understood your lordship perfectly, but I couldn't see the guard," answered Wilkins. "I caught sight of him running up to his van-door at the last moment, but the train began to move off, and I had to jump in myself, or else be left behind."

The guard passed as he was explaining this, and the nobleman drew his attention to the lamp, curtly ordering him to "light it instantly." Lifting his hat to us by way of farewell, he disappeared; and the lunatic began upon the guard as if he were commencing a lecture in Bedlam to a deaf audience. The guard seemed

not to hear it, so lost was he in astonishment at there being no light.

"Why, what can have doubted it?" he cried aloud, staring up at the lamp. And the Squire smiled at the familiar word, so common in our ears at home, and had a great mind to ask the guard whence he came.

"I lighted all these here lamps myself afore we started, and I see 'em all burning," said he. There was no mistaking the home accent now, and the Squire looked down the carriage with a beaming face.

"You are from Worcestershire, my man."

"From Worcester itself, sir. Leastways from St. John's, which is the same thing."

"Whether you are from Worcester, or whether you are from Jericho, I'll let you know that you can't put dark lamps into first-class carriages on this line without being made to answer for it!" roared the lunatic. "What's your name? I am a director."

"My name is Thomas Brooks, sir," replied the man, respectfully touching his silver-banded cap. "But I declare to you, sir, that I've told the truth in saying the lamps were all right when we started: how this one can have got doubted, I can't think. There's not a guard on the line, sir, more particular in seeing to the lamps than I am."

"Well, light it now; don't waste time excusing yourself," growled the lunatic. But he

said nothing about the dog; which was surprising.

In a twinkling the lamp was lighted, and we were off again. The lady and her dog were quiet now: he was out of sight: she leaned back to go to sleep. The Squire put his head against the curtain, and shut his eyes to do the same; the little man, as before, never looked off his book; and the lunatic frantically shifted himself every two minutes between his own seat and that of the opposite corner. There were no more tunnels, and we went smoothly on to the next station. Five minutes allowed there.

The little man, putting his book in his pocket, took up a black leather bag from above his head, and got out; the lady, her dog hidden still, prepared to follow him, wishing the Squire and me, and even the lunatic, with a forgiving smile, a polite good morning. I had moved to that end, and was watching the lady's wonderful back hair as she stepped out, when all in a moment the Squire sprang up with a shout and a cry, and jumped out nearly upon her, calling out that he had been robbed. She dropped the dog, and I thought he must have caught the lunatic's disorder and become frantic.

It is of no use attempting to describe exactly what followed. The lady, snatching up her dog, shrieked out that perhaps she had been robbed too; she laid hold of the Squire's arm,

and went with him into the station-master's room. And there we were : us three ; and the guard, and the station-master, and the lunatic, who had come pouncing out too at the Squire's cry. The man in spectacles had disappeared for good.

The Squire's pocket-book was gone. He gave his name and address at once to the station-master : and the guard's face lighted with intelligence when he heard it, for he knew Squire Todhetley by reputation. The pocket-book had been safe just before we entered the tunnel ; the Squire was certain of that, having felt it. He had sat in the carriage with his coat unbuttoned, rather thrown back ; and nothing could have been easier than for a practised thief to draw it cleverly out, under cover of the darkness.

"I had fifty pounds in it," he said ; " fifty pounds in five-pound notes. And some memoranda besides."

" Fifty pounds !" cried out the lady, quickly. " And you could travel with all that about you, and not button up your coat ! You ought to be rich ! "

" Have you been in the habit of meeting thieves, madam, when travelling ? " suddenly demanded the lunatic, turning upon her without warning, his coat whirling about on all sides with the rapidity of his movements, as if the wind took it.

“No, sir, I have not,” she answered, in an indignant tone. “Have you?”

“I have not, madam. But then, you perceive I see no risk in travelling with a coat unbuttoned, although it may have bank-notes in its pockets.”

She made no reply: was too much occupied in turning out her own pockets and purse, to ascertain that they had not been rifled. Re-assured on the point, she sat down on a low box against the wall, nursing her dog; which had begun his snarling barks again.

“It must have been taken from me in the darkness as we went through the tunnel,” affirmed the Squire to the room in general and perhaps the station-master in particular. “I am a magistrate, and have some experience in these things. I sat completely off my guard, a ready prey to anybody, my hands stretched out before me, grappling with that dog, that seemed—why, goodness me! yes he *did*, now that I think of it—that seemed to be held about fifteen inches off my nose on purpose to attack me. That’s when the thing must have been done. But now—which of them could it have been?”

He meant of the passengers. As he looked hard at us in rotation, especially at the guard and station-master, who had not been in the carriage, the lady gave a shrill shriek, and threw the dog into the middle of the room.

"I see it all," she said, faintly. "He has a habit of snatching at things with his mouth. He must have snatched the case out of your pocket, sir, and dropped it from the window. You will find it in the tunnel."

"Who has?" asked the lunatic, while the Squire stared in wonder.

"My poor little Wasp. Ah, villain! beast! it is he that has done all this mischief."

"He might have taken the pocket-book," I said, thinking it time to speak, "but he could not have dropped it out, for I put the window up as we went into the tunnel."

It seemed a nonplus, and her face fell again. "There was the other window," she said in a minute. "He might have dropped it there. I heard his bark quite close to it."

"I pulled up that window, madam," said the lunatic. "If the dog did take it out of the pocket it may be in the carriage now."

The guard rushed out to search it; the Squire followed, but the station-master remained where he was, and closed the door after them. A thought came over me that he was staying to keep the two passengers in view.

No; the pocket-book could not be found in the carriage. As they came back, the Squire was asking the guard if he knew who the nobleman was who had got out at the last station with his servant. But the guard did not.

"He said they knew him on the line."

"Very likely sir. I have not been on this line above a month or two."

"Well, this is an unpleasant affair," said the lunatic impatiently, "and the question is—What's to be done? It appears pretty evident that your pocket-book was taken in the carriage, sir. Of the four passengers, I suppose the one who left us at the last station must be held exempt from suspicion, being a nobleman. Another got out here, and has disappeared; the other two are present. I propose that we should both be searched."

"I'm sure I am quite willing," said the lady, and she got up at once.

I think the Squire was about to disclaim any wish so to act; but the lunatic was resolute, and the station-master agreed with him. There was no time to be lost, for the train was in a hurry to go, her minutes were up, and the lunatic was turned out. The lady went into another room with two women, called by the station-master, and *she* was turned out. Neither of them had the pocket-book.

"Here's my card, sir," said the lunatic, handing one to Mr. Todhetley. "You know my name, I daresay. If I can be of any future assistance to you in this matter, you may command me."

"Bless my heart!" cried the Squire, as he read the name on the card. "How could you allow yourself to be searched, sir?"

“Because, in such a case as this, I think it only right and fair that everybody who has the misfortune to be mixed up in it *should* be searched,” replied the lunatic, as they went out together. “It is a satisfaction to both parties. Unless you offered to search me, you could not have offered to search that woman; and I suspected her.”

“Suspected *her!*” cried the Squire, opening his eyes.

“If I didn’t suspect, I doubted. Why on earth did she cause her dog to make all that row the moment we got into the tunnel? It must have been done then. I should not be startled out of my senses if I heard that that silent man by my side and hers was in league with her.”

The Squire stood in a kind of maze, trying to recal what he could of the little man in spectacles, and see if things would fit into one another.

“Don’t you like her look?” he suddenly asked.

“No, I *don’t*,” said the lunatic, turning himself about recklessly. “I have a prejudice against painted women: they put me in mind of Jezebel. Look at her hair. It’s awful.”

He went out in a storm, and took his seat in the carriage, not a moment before it puffed off.

“*Is* he a lunatic?” I whispered to the Squire.

“He a lunatic!” he roared. “You must

be a lunatic for asking it, Johnny. Why, that's—that's——"

Instead of saying more, he showed me the card, and the name nearly took my breath away. He is a well-known London man, of science, talent, and position, and of world-wide fame.

"Well, I thought him nothing better than an escaped maniac."

"*Did you?*" said the Squire. "Perhaps he returned the compliment on you, sir. But now—Johnny, who has got my pocket-book?"

As if it was any use asking me! As we turned back to the station-master's room, the lady came into it, evidently resenting the search, although she had seemed to acquiesce in it so readily.

"They were rude, those women. It is the first time I ever had the misfortune to travel with men who carry pocket-books to lose them, and I hope it will be the last," she pursued, in scornful passion, meant for the Squire. "One generally meets with *gentlemen* in a first-class carriage."

The emphasis came out with a sort of shriek, and it told on him. Now that she was proved innocent, he was as vexed as she for having listened to the advice of the scientific man—but I can't help calling him a lunatic still. The Squire's apologies might have disarmed a cross-grained hyæna; and she came round with a smile.

“ If anybody *has* got the pocket-book,” she said, as she stroked her dog’s ears, “ it must be that silent man with the gold spectacles. There was nobody else, sir, who could have reached you without getting up to do it. And I declare on my honour that when that commotion first arose through my poor little dog, I felt for a moment something like a man’s arm stretched out across me. It could only have been his. I hope you have the numbers of the notes.

“ But I have not,” said the Squire.

The room was being invaded by this time. Two stray passengers, a friend of the station-master’s, and the porter who took the tickets, had crept in. All thought the lady’s opinion must be correct, and said the spectacled man had got clear off with the pocket-book. There was nobody else to pitch upon. A nobleman travelling with his servant would not be likely to commit a robbery ; the lunatic was really the man his card represented him to be, for the station-master’s friend had seen and recognized him ; and the lady was proved innocent by practical search. Wasn’t the Squire in a passion !

“ That close reading of his was all a blind,” he said, in sudden conviction. “ He kept his face down that we should not know him in future. He never looked at one of us ! he never said a word ! I shall go and find him.”

Away went the Squire, as fast as he could run, but came back in a moment to know which was the way out, and where it led to. There was quite a lot of us by this time. Some fields lay beyond the outlet of the station at the back; and a boy affirmed that he had seen a little gentleman in spectacles, with a black bag in his hand, making over the first stile.

"Now look you here, boy," said the Squire. "If you catch that same man, I'll give you five shillings."

Tod could not have flown faster than the boy did. He took the stile at a kind of leap; it was high and awkward; and the Squire tumbled over it after him. Some boys and men joined in the chase; and a cow, feeding in the field, trotted after us and brought up the rear.

Such a shout from the boy! It came from behind the opposite hedge of the long field. I was over the gate first; the Squire came next.

On the edge of the dry ditch sat the passenger, his legs hanging down, his neck imprisoned in the boy's arms. I knew him at once. His hat and his gold spectacles had fallen off in the scuffle; the black bag was wide open, and had a tall bunch of something green sticking up from it; some tools lay on the ground.

"Oh, you wicked hypocrite!" spluttered the Squire, not in the least knowing what he said in his passion. "Are you not ashamed to have

played upon me such a vile trick ? How dare you go about to commit robberies ! ”

“ I have not robbed you, at any rate,” said the man, his voice shaking a little and his face pale, while the boy loosed the neck but pinioned the arms behind.

“ Not robbed me ! ” cried the Squire. “ Good heavens ! Whom do you suppose you have robbed, if not me ? Here, Johnny, lad, you are a witness. He says he has not robbed me.”

“ I did not know it was yours,” said the man meekly, “ Loose me, boy ; I’ll not attempt to run away.”

“ Halloa ! here ! what’s to do ? ” roared a big fellow, swinging himself over the gate. “ Any tramp been trespassing ?—anybody wanting to be took up ? I’m the parish constable.”

If he had said he was the parish engine, ready to let loose buckets of water on the offender, he could not have been more welcome. The Squire’s face was rosy with satisfaction.

“ Have you got your handcuffs with you, my man ? ”

“ I’ve not got them, sir ; but I fancy I’m big enough and strong enough to take *him* without ’em. Something to spare, too.”

“ There’s nothing like handcuffs for safety,” said the Squire, rather damped, for he believed in them as one of the country’s institutions. “ Oh, you villain ! Perhaps you can tie him with cords ? ”

The thief floundered out of the ditch and stood upon his feet. He did not look an ungentlemanly thief, now you came to see him and hear him ; and his face, though scared and white, might have been thought an honest one. He picked up his hat and glasses, and held them in his hand while he spoke, in a tone of earnest remonstrance.

“ Surely, sir, you will not have me taken up for this slight offence ! I did not know I was doing wrong, and I doubt if the law would condemn me ; I thought it was public property.”

“ Public property ! ” danced the Squire, turning red at the words. “ Of all the impudent brazen-faced rascals that are cheating the gallows, you must be the worst. My bank-notes public property ! ”

“ Your what, sir ? ”

“ My bank-notes, you villain. How dare you repeat your insolent question ! ”

“ But I don’t know anything about your bank-notes, sir,” said the man meekly. “ I do not know what you mean.”

They stood facing each other, a sight for a picture: the Squire with his hands under his coat, dancing a little in rage, his face crimson ; the other quite still, holding his hat and gold spectacles, and looking at him in wonder.

“ You don’t know what I mean ! When you confessed with your last breath that you had robbed me of my pocket-book ! ”

"I confessed—I have not sought to conceal—that I have robbed the ground of this rare fern," said the man, handling carefully the green-stuff in the black bag. "I have not robbed you, or anyone, of anything else."

The tone, simple, quiet, self-contained, put the Squire in amaze. He stood staring.

"Are you a fool?" he asked. "What do you suppose I have to do with your rubbishing ferns?"

"Nay, I supposed you owned them; that is, owned the land. You led me to believe so, in saying I had robbed you."

"What I've lost is a pocket-book, with ten five-pound bank-notes in it; I lost it in the train; it must have been taken as we came through the tunnel; and you sat next but one to me," reiterated the Squire.

The man put on his hat and glasses. "I am a geologist and botanist, sir. I came here after this plant to-day—having seen it yesterday, but I had not then my tools with me. I don't know anything about the pocket-book and bank-notes."

So that was another mistake, for the botanist turned out of his pockets a heap of letters directed to him, and a big book he had been reading in the train, a treatise on botany, to prove who he was. And, as if to leave no loop-hole of doubt, one stepped up who knew him, and assured the Squire there was not a more

learned man in his line, no, nor one more respected, in the three kingdoms. The Squire shook him by the hand in apologizing, and told him we had some valuable ferns near Dyke Manor, if he would come and see them.

Like Patience on a monument, when we got back, sat the lady, waiting to see the prisoner brought in. Her face would have made a picture too, when she discovered the upshot, and saw the hot Squire and the gold spectacles walking side by side in friendly talk.

"I think still he must have got it," she said, sharply.

"No, madam," answered the Squire. "Whoever may have taken it, it was not he."

"Then there's only one man, and that is he whom you have let go on in the train," she decisively returned: "I thought his fidgety movements were not put on for nothing. He had secured the pocket-book somewhere, and then made a show of offering to be searched. Ah, ha!"

And the Squire veered round again at this suggestion, and began to suspect he had been doubly cheated. First out of his money, next out of his suspicions. One only thing in the whole bother seemed clear; and that was, that the notes and case had gone for good. As, in point of fact, they had.

We were on the chain-pier at Brighton, Tod and I. It was about eight or nine months after. I had put my arms on the high rails at the end, looking at a pleasure-party sailing by. Tod, next to me, was bewailing his ill-fortune in not possessing a yacht and opportunities of cruising in it.

"I tell you No. I don't want to be made sea-sick."

The words came from somebody behind us. It seemed almost as though they were spoken in reference to Tod's wish for a yacht to cruise in. But it was not *that* that made me turn sharply round; it was the sound of the voice, for I thought I recognized it.

Yes: there she was. The lady who had been with us in the carriage that day. The dog was not with her now, but her hair was more amazing than ever, enough of it hanging down behind to make a horse's tail. She did not see me. As I turned, she turned, and began to walk slowly back, arm-in-arm with a gentleman. And to see him—that is, to see them together—made me open my eyes. For it was the lord who had travelled with us.

"Look, Tod!" I said, and told him in a word who they were.

"What the deuce do they know of each other?" cried Tod with a frown, for he felt angry every time the thing was referred to. Not for the loss of the money, but for what he

called the stupidity of us all; saying always had *he* been there, he should have detected the thief at once.

I sauntered after them: why I wanted to learn which of the lords he was, I can't tell, for lords are numerous enough, but I had had a curiosity upon the point ever since. They encountered some people and were standing to speak; three ladies, and a fellow in a black glazed hat with a piece of green ribbon round it.

"I was trying to induce my wife to take a sail," the lord was saying, "but she won't. She is not a very good sailor, unless the sea has its calmest behaviour on."

"Will you go to-morrow, Mrs. Mowbray?" asked the man in the glazed hat, who spoke and looked like a gentleman. "I will promise you perfect calmness; I am weather-wise, and can assure you this little wind will have gone down before night, leaving us without a breath of air."

"I will go: on condition that your assurance shall prove correct."

"All right. You of course will come, Mowbray?"

The lord nodded. "Very happy."

"When do you leave Brighton, Mr. Mowbray?" asked one of the ladies.

"I don't know exactly. Not for some days."

"A muff as usual, Johnny," whispered Tod.

"That man is no lord; he is a Mr. Mowbray."

"But, Tod, he *is* the lord. It is the one that travelled with us; there's no mistake about that. Lords can't put off their titles as parsons can: do you suppose his servant would have called him 'my lord,' if he had not been one?"

"At least there is no mistake that these people are calling him Mr. Mowbray now."

That was true. It was equally true that they were calling her Mrs. Mowbray. My ears had been as quick as Tod's, and I don't deny I was puzzled. They turned to come up the pier again with the people, and the lady saw me standing there with Tod. Saw me looking at her, too, and I think she did not relish it, for she took a step backward like one startled, and then stared me full in the face, as if asking who I might be. I lifted my hat.

There was no response. In another moment she and her husband were walking quickly down the pier together, and the other party went on to the top quietly. A man in a tweed suit and brown hat drawn low on his eyes, was standing back with his arms folded, looking after the two with a queer smile upon his face. Tod marked it and spoke.

"Do you happen to know that gentleman?"

"Yes, I do," was the answer.

"Is he a peer?"

“On occasion.”

“On occasion !” repeated Tod. “I have a reason for asking,” he added ; “do not think me impertinent.”

“Been swindled out of anything ?” asked the man, coolly.

“My father was, some months ago. He lost a pocket-book with fifty pounds in it in a railway carriage. Those people were both in it, but not then acquainted with each other.”

“Oh, weren’t they !” said the man.

“No, they were not,” I put in, “for I was there. He was a lord then.”

“Ah,” said the man, “and had a servant in livery no doubt, who came up my-lording him without occasion every other minute. He is a member of the swell-mob ; one of the cleverest of the *gentlemen* fraternity of them, and the one who acts as servant is another.”

“And the lady ?” I asked.

“She is a third. They have been working in concert for two or three years now ; and will give us trouble yet before their career is stopped. But for being cautiously clever, we should have had them long ago. And so they did not know each other in the train ! I dare-say not !”

The man spoke with quiet authority. He was a detective officer come down from London to Brighton that morning ; whether for a private sanatory trip, or on business, he did not say.

I related to him what had passed in the train.

"Ay," said he, after listening. "They contrived to put the lamp out before starting. The lady took the pocket-book during the commotion she caused the dog to make, and the lord received it from her hand when he gave her back the dog." Cleverly done! He had it about him, young sir, when he got out at the next station. *She* waited to be searched, and to throw the scent off. Very ingenious: but they'll be a little too much so some fine day."

"Can't you take them up?" demanded Tod.

"No."

"I will accuse them of it," he haughtily said. "If I meet them again on this pier——"

"Which you won't do to-day," interrupted the man.

"I heard them say they were not going for some days."

"Ah, but they have seen you now. And I think—I'm not quite sure—that he saw me. They'll be off by the next train."

"Who are *they*?" asked Tod, pointing to the top of the pier."

"Unsuspicious people whose acquaintance they have casually made here. Yes, an hour or two will see Brighton quit of the pair."

And it was so. A train was starting within an hour, and Tod and I galloped to the station. There they were: in a first-class carriage: not

apparently knowing each other, I verily believe, for he sat at one door and she at the other, passengers dividing them.

“Lambs between two wolves,” remarked Tod. “I have a great mind to warn the people of the sort of company they are in. Would it be actionable, Johnny?”

The train moved off as he was speaking. And may I never write another word, if I did not catch sight of the servant-man and his cockade in the carriage next behind them!

IX.

DICK MITCHEL.

I DID not relate this story by my own wish. To my mind there's nothing much in it to relate. At the time it was written the newspapers were squabbling about farmers' boys and field labour and political economy. "And," says a gentleman to me, "as you were at the top and tail of the thing when it happened, and are well up in the subject generally, Johnny Ludlow, you may as well make a paper of it." That was no other than the surgeon—Duffham.

About two miles from Dyke Manor across the fields, but in the opposite direction to that of the Court where the Sterlings lived, Elm Farm was situated. Mr. Jacobson lived in it, as his father had lived before him. The property was not their own; they rented it: it was fine land, and Jacobson had the reputation of being the best farmer for miles round. Being a wealthy man, he had no need to spare money on house or land, and did not spare it. He and the Squire were about the same age, and had been cronies all their lives.

Not to go into extraneous matter, I may as well say at once that one of the labourers on Jacobson's farm was a man named John Mitchel. He lived in a cottage not far from us—a poor place of two rooms and a washhouse ; but they call it back'us there—and had to walk nearly two miles to his work of a morning. Mitchel was a steady man of thirty-five, with a round head and not any great amount of brains inside it. Not but what he had as much brains as many labourers have, and quite enough for the kind of work his life was passed in. There were six children ; the eldest, Dick, ten years old ; and most of them had straw-coloured hair, the pattern of their father's.

Just before the turn of harvest one hot summer, John Mitchel presented himself at Mr. Jacobson's house in a clean smock frock, and asked a favour. It was, that his boy, Dick, should be taken on as ploughboy. Old Jacobson objected ; saying the boy was too young and little. Little he might be, Mitchel answered, but not too young—warn't he ten? The lad had been about the farm for some time as scarecrow : that is, employed to keep the birds away : and had a shilling a week for it. Old Jacobson stood to what he said, however, and little Dick did not get his promotion.

But old Jacobson got no peace. Every opportunity Mitchel could get, or dare to use, he began again, praving that Dick might be

tried. The boy was "cute," he said, strong enough also, though little; and if the master liked to pay him only fourpence a day, they'd be grateful for it; 'twould be a help, and was wanted badly. All of no use: old Jacobson still said No.

One afternoon during this time, we started to go to the Jacobsons' after a one o'clock dinner. I and Mrs. Todhetley. She was fond of going over to an early tea there, but not by herself, for part of the near way across the fields was lonely. Considering that she had been used to the country, she was a regular coward as to lonely walks, expecting to see a tramp or a robber at every corner. In passing the row of cottages in Duck Lane, for that's the road we took, we saw Hannah Mitchel leaning over the footboard of her door to look after her children, who were playing near the pond in the sunshine with a lot more; quite a heap of the little reptiles, all badly clad and as dirty as pigs. Other labourers' dwellings stood within hail, and the children seemed to spring up in the place thicker than wheat; Mrs. Mitchel's was quite a small family, reckoning by comparison, but how the six got clothed and fed was a mystery, out of Mitchel's wages of ten shillings a week. It was thought good pay. Old Jacobson was liberal, as farmers go. He paid the best wages; gave all his labourers a stunning big portion of home-fed fresh pork at

Christmas, with fuel to cook it : and his wife was good to the women when they fell sick.

Mrs. Todhetley stopped to speak. "Is it you, Hannah Mitchel? Are you pretty well?"

Hannah Mitchel stood upright and dropped a curtsy. She had a covered-up bundle in her arms, which proved to be the baby, then not much above a fortnight old.

"Dear me! it's very early for it to be about," said Mrs. Todhetley, touching its little red cheeks. "And for you too."

"It is, ma'am: but what's to be done?" was the answer. "When there's only a pair of hands for everything, one can't afford to lie by long."

"You seem but poorly," said Mrs. Todhetley, looking at her. She was a thin, dark-haired woman, with a sensible face. Before she married Mitchel, she had lived under nurse in a gentleman's family, where she picked up some idea of good manners.

"I be feeling a bit stronger, thank you," said the woman. "Strength don't come back to one in a day, ma'am."

The Mitchel children were sidling up, attracted by the sight of the lady. Four young grubs in tattered garments.

"I can't keep 'em decent," said the mother, with a sigh of apology. "I've not got no soap nor no clothes to do it with. They come on so fast, and make such a many, one after

another, that it's getting a hard pull to live anyhow."

Looking at the children; remembering that, with the father and mother, there were eight mouths to feed, and that the man's wages were the ten shillings weekly all the year round (but there were seasons when he did over-work and earned more), Mrs. Todhetley might well give her assenting answer with an emphatic nod.

"We was hoping to get on a bit better," resumed the wife; "but Mitchel he says the master don't seem to like to listen. A'most a three week it be now since Mitchel first asked it him."

"In what way better?"

"By a putting little Dick to the plough, ma'am. He gets a shilling a week now, he'd get two then, perhaps three, and 'twould be such a help to us. Some o' the farmers gives fourpence halfpenny a day to a ploughboy, some as much as sixpence. The master he bain't one o' the near ones; but Dick be little of his age, he don't grow fast, and Mitchel telled the master he'd take fourpence a day and be thankful for't."

Thoughts were crowding into Mrs. Todhetley's mind—as she mentioned afterwards. A child of ten ought to be learning and playing; not working from twelve to fourteen hours a day.

"It would be a hard life for him."

“True, ma’am, at first; but he’d get used to it. I could have wished the summer was coming on instead o’ the winter—’twould be easier for him to begin upon. Winter mornings be so dark and cold.”

“Why not let him wait until the next winter’s over?”

The very suggestion brought tears into Hannah Mitchel’s eyes. “You’d never say it, ma’am, if you knew how bad his wages is wanted and the help they’d be. The older childern grows, the more they wants to eat; and we’ve got six of ’em now. What would you, ma’am?—they don’t bring food into the world with ’em; they must help to earn it for themselves as quick as anybody can be got to let ’em earn it. Sometimes I wonder why God should send such large families to us poor people.”

Mrs. Todhetley was turning to go on her way, when the woman in a timid voice said, “Might she make bold to ask, if she or Squire Todhetley would say a good word to Mr. Jacobson about the boy: that it would be just a merciful kindness.

“We should not like to interfere,” replied Mrs. Todhetley. “In any case I could not do it with a good heart: I think it would be so hard upon the poor little boy.”

“Starving’s harder, ma’am.”

The tears came running down her cheeks

with the answer; and they won over Mrs. Todhetley.

Crossing the high, crooked, awkward stile—over which, in coming the other way, if people were not careful they generally pitched over with their noses into Duck Lane mud—we found ourselves in what was called the square paddock, a huge piece of land, ploughed last year. The wheat had been carried from it only this afternoon, and the gleaners in their cotton bonnets were coming in. On, from thence, across other fields and stiles. We went a little out of our way to call at Glebe Cottage—a small white house that lay back amidst the fields—and enquire after old Mrs. Parry, who had just had a stroke.

Who should be at Elm Farm, when we got in, but the surgeon, Duffham: come on there from paying his daily visit to Mrs. Parry. He and old Jacobson were in the green-house, looking at the grapes: a famous crop they had that year; not ripe yet. Mrs. Jacobson sat at the open window of the long parlour, making a new jelly-bag. She was a pleasant-faced old lady, with small flat silver curls and a net cap.

Of course they got talking about little Dick Mitchel. Duffham knew the boy; seeing that when a doctor was wanted at the Mitchels', it was he that attended. Mrs. Todhetley told exactly what had passed: and old Jacobson—

a tall, portly man, with a healthy colour—grew nearly purple in the face, disputing.

Dick Mitchel would be of as good as no use for the team, he said, and the carters put shamefully upon those young ones. In another year the boy would be stronger and bigger. Perhaps he would take him then.

“For my part, I cannot think how the mothers can like their poor boys to go out so young,” cried the old lady, looking up from her flannel bag. “A ploughboy’s life is very hard in winter.”

“Hannah Mitchel says it has to be one of two things—early work or starving,” said Mrs. Todhetley. “And that’s pretty true.”

“Labourers’ boys are born to it, ma’am, and so it comes easy to ’em: as skinning does to eels,” cried Duffham, quaintly.

“Poor things, yes. But it is very hard upon the children. The worst is, all the labourers seem to have no end of them. Hannah Mitchel has just said she sometimes wonders why God should send so many to poor people.”

This was an unfortunate remark. To hear the two gentlemen laugh, you’d have thought they were at a Christmas pantomime. Old Jacobson brought himself up in a kind of passion.

What business, in the name of all that was imprudent, had these poor people to have their troops of children? he asked. They knew quite well they could not feed them; that the young ones would be three parts starved in their earlier

years, and in their later ones come to the parish and be a burden on the community. Look at this same man, Mitchel. His grandfather, a poor miserable labourer, had a troop of children; Mitchel's father had a troop, twelve; *he*, Mitchel, had six, and seemed to be going on fair to have six more. There was no reason in it. Why couldn't they be content with a moderate number, three or four, that might get a chance of being found room for in the world? It was not much less than a crime for these men, next door to paupers themselves, to launch their tens and their dozens of boys and girls into life, and then turn round and say, Why does God send them? Nice kind of logic, that was!

And so he kept on, for a good half-hour, Duffham helping him. *He* brought up the French peasantry: saying our folks ought to take a lesson from them. You don't see whole flocks of children over there, cried Duffham. One, or two, or at most three, would be found to comprise the number of a family. And why? Because the French were a prudent race. They knew there was no provision for superfluous children; no house-room at home, or food, or clothing; and no parish pay to fall back upon: they knew that however many children they had they must provide for them: they didn't set up, of themselves, a regiment of little famishing mouths, and then charge it on heaven; they were not so reckless and wicked. Yes, he must

repeat it, wicked ; and the two ladies listening would endorse the word if they knew half the deprivation and the sufferings these poor small mortals were born to ; he saw enough of it, having to be often amidst them.

“Why don’t you tell the parents this, doctor ?”

Tell them ! returned Duffham. He *had* told them ; told them till his tongue was tired.

Any way, the little things were grievously to be pitied, was what the two ladies made answer.

“I have often wished it was not a sin to drown the superfluous little mites as we do kittens,” wound up Duff.

One of the ladies dropped the jelly-bag, the other shrieked out, Oh !

“For their sakes,” he added. “It’s true, upon my word and honour. Of all wrongs the world sees, never was there a worse wrong than the one inflicted on these inoffensive children by the parents, in bringing them into it. God help the little wretches ! man can’t do much.”

And so they talked on. The upshot was, that old Jacobson stood to his word, and declined to make Dick Mitchel a ploughboy yet awhile.

We had tea at four o’clock—at which fashionable people may laugh ; considering that it was the real tea, not the sham one lately come into custom. Mrs. Todhetley wanted to get home by daylight, and the summer evenings were shortening. Never was brown bread-and-

butter so sweet as the Jacobsons': we used to say it every time we went; and the home-baked rusks were better than Shrewsbury cake. They made Mrs. Todhetley take two or three in her bag for Hugh and Lena.

Old Duff went with us across the first field, turning off there to take the short cut to his home. It was a warm, still, lovely evening, the yellow moon rising. The gleaners were busy in the square paddock: Mrs. Todhetley spoke to some as we passed. At the other end, near the crooked stile, two urchins stood fighting, the bigger one trying to take a small armful of wheat from the other. I went to the rescue, and the marauder made off as fast as his small bare feet would carry him.

"He haven't gleaned, hisself, and wants to take mine," said the little one, casting up his big gray eyes to us in appeal through the tears. He was a delicate-looking pale-faced boy of nine, or so, with light hair.

"Very naughty of him," said Mrs. Todhetley. "What's your name?"

"It's Dick, lady."

"Dick—what?"

"Dick Mitchel."

"Dear me—I thought I had seen the face," said Mrs. Todhetley to me. "But there are so many boys about here, Johnny; and they all look pretty much alike. How old are you, Dick?"

"I'm over ten," answered Dick, with an

emphasis on the over. Children catch up ideas, and no doubt he was as eager as the parents could be to impress on the world his fitness, in years, to be a ploughboy.

"How is it that you have been gleaning, Dick?"

"Mother couldn't, 'cause o' the babby. They give me leave to come on since four o'clock: and I've got all this."

Dick looked at the stile and then at his bundle of wheat, so I took it while he got over. As we went on down the lane, Mrs. Todhetley inquired whether he wanted to be a ploughboy. Oh yes! he answered, his face lighting up, as if the situation offered some glorious prospect. It 'ud be two shilling a week; happen more; and mother said as he and Totty and Sam and the t'others 'ud get treacle to their bread on Sundays then. Apparently Mrs. Mitchel knew how to diplomatize.

"I'll give him one of the rusks, I think, Johnny," whispered Mrs. Todhetley.

But while she was getting it from the bag, he ran in with his wheat. She called to him to come back, and gave him one. His mother had taken the wheat from him; she looked out at the door with it in her hands. Seeing her, Mrs. Todhetley went up, and said Mr. Jacobson would not at present do anything. The next minute Mitchel appeared, pulling at his straw hair.

"It is hard lines," he said, humbly, "when the lad's of a' age to be a earning, and the master can't be got to take him on. And me to ha' worked on the same farm, man and boy; and father afore me."

"Mr. Jacobson thinks the boy would not be strong enough for the work."

"Not strong enough, and him rising eleven!" exclaimed Mitchel, as if the words were some dreadful aspersion on Dick. "How can he be strong if he gets no work to make him strong, ma'am? Strength comes with the working—and nobody don't oughtn't to know that better nor the master. Anyhow, if he *don't* take him, it'll be cruel hard lines for us."

Dick was outside, dividing the rusk with a small girl and boy, all three seated in the lane, and looking as happy over the rusk as if they had been children in a fairy tale. "It's Totty," said he, pausing in the work of division to speak, "and that 'un's Sam." Mrs. Todhetley could not resist the temptation of finding two more rusks; which made one apiece.

"He is a good-natured little fellow, Johnny," she remarked as we went along. "Intelligent too: in that he takes after his mother."

"Would it be wrong to let him go on the farm as ploughboy?"

"Johnny, I don't know. I'd rather not give an opinion," she added, looking right before her into the moon, as if seeking for one there. "Of

course he is not old enough or big enough, practically speaking: but on the other hand, where there are so many mouths to feed, it seems hard not to let him earn money if he can earn it. The root of the evil lies in there being so many mouths—as was said at Mr. Jacobson's this afternoon."

It was winter before I heard anything more of the matter. Tod and I got home for Christmas. One day in January, when the skies were lowering, and the air cold with a raw coldness, but not frosty, I was crossing a field on old Jacobson's land, then being ploughed. The three brown horses at the work were as fine as ye'd wish to see.

"You'll catch it smart on that there skull o' yourn, if ye doan't keep their yeads straight, ye young divil."

The salutation was from the man at the tail of the plough to the boy at the head of the first horse. Looking round, I saw little Mitchel. The horses stopped, and I went up to him. Hall, the ploughman, took the opportunity to beat his arms. I daresay they were cold enough.

"So your ambition is attained, is it, Dick? Are you satisfied?"

Dick seemed not to understand. He was taller, but the face looked pinched, and there was never a smile on it.

“Do you like being a ploughboy?”

“It’s hard and cold. Hard always; frightful cold of a morning.”

“How’s Totty?”

The face lighted up just a little. Totty weren’t any better, but she didn’t die; Jimmy did. Which was Jimmy?—Oh, Jimmy was after Nanny, next to the babby.

“What did Jimmy die of?”

Whooping-cough. They’d all been bad but him—Dick. Mother said he’d had it when he was no older nor the babby.

Whether the whooping-cough had caused an undue absorption of Mitchel’s means, certain it was, Dick looked famished. His cheeks were thin, his hands blue.

“Have you been ill, Dick?”

No, he had not been ill. ’Twas Jimmy and the t’others.

“He’s the incapablest little villain I ever had put me to do with,” struck in the ploughman, stilling his arms to speak. “More lazy nor a fattening pig.”

“Are you lazy, Dick?”

I think an eager disclaimer was coming out, but the boy remembered in time who was present—his master, the ploughman.

“Not lazy wilful,” he said, bursting into tears. “I does my best: mother tells me to.”

“Take that, you young sniveller,” said Hall, dealing him a good sound slap on the left

cheek. "And now go on: ye know ye've got this lot to go through to-day."

He caught hold of the plough, and Dick stretched up his poor trembling hands to the first horse to guide him. I am sure the boy *was* trying to do his best: but he looked weak and famished and ill.

"Why did you strike him, Hall? He did nothing to deserve it."

"He don't deserve nothing else," was Hall's answer. "Let him alone, and the furrows 'ud be as crooked as a dog's leg. You dun' know what these young 'uns be for work, sir.—Keep 'em in the line, you fool!"

Looking back as I went down the field, I watched the plough going slowly up it, Dick seeming to have his hands full with the well-fed horses.

"Yes, I heard the lad was taken on, Johnny," Mrs. Todhetley said when I told her that evening. "Mitchel prevailed with his master at last. Mr. Jacobson is good-hearted, and knew the Mitchels were in sore need of the extra money the boy would earn. Sickness makes a difference to the poor as well as to the rich."

I saw Dick Mitchel three or four times during that January month. The Jacobsons had two nephews staying with them from Oxfordshire, and it caused us to go over often. The boy seemed a weak little mite for the place: but of course, having undertaken the work, he

had to do it. He was no worse off than others. To be at the farm before six o'clock, he had to leave home at half-past five, taking his breakfast with him, which was mostly dry bread. As to the boy's work, it varied—as those acquainted with the executive of a busy farm can tell. Besides the ploughing, he had to pump, and carry water and straw, and help with the horses, and go errands to the blacksmith's and elsewhere, and so on. Carters and ploughmen do not spare their helping boys: and on a large farm like this they are the immediate rulers, not the master himself. Had Dick been under Mr. Jacobson's personal eye, perhaps it might have been lightened a little, for he was a humane man. There were three things that made it seem particularly hard for Dick Mitchel, and those three were under nobody's control: his natural weakliness, his living so far off the farm, and its being winter weather. In summer the work is nothing like as hard for the boys; and it was a great pity that Dick had not first entered on his duties in that season to get inured to them against the winter. Mr. Jacobson gave him the best wages—three shillings a week. Looking at the addition it must have seemed to Mitchel's ten, it was little wonder he had not ceased to petition old Jacobson.

The Jacobsons were kind to the boy—as I can testify. One cold day when I was over there with the nephews, shooting birds, we went

into the best kitchen at twelve o'clock for some pea-soup. They were going to carry the basins into the parlour, but we said we'd rather eat it there by the blazing big fire. Mrs. Jacobson came in. I can see her now, with a soft white woollen kerchief thrown over her shoulders to keep the cold off, and her net cap above her silver curls. We were getting our second basinfuls.

"Do have some, aunt," said Fred. "It's the best you ever tasted."

"No, thank you, Fred. I don't care to spoil my dinner."

"It won't spoil ours."

She laughed a little, and stood looking from the window into the fold-yard, saying presently that she feared the frost was going to set in now in earnest, which would not be pleasant for their journey.—For this was the last day of the nephews' stay, and she was going home with them for a week. There had been no very sharp cold all the winter: which was a shame because of the skating: if the ponds got a thin coating of ice on them one day, it would be all melted the next.

"Bless me! there's that poor child sitting out in the cold! What is he eating?—his dinner?"

Her words made us look from the window. Dick Mitchel had stuck himself down by the far-off pig-sty, and seemed to be eating something that he held in his hands. He was very

white—as might be seen even from where we stood.

“Mary,” said she to one of the servants, “go and call that boy in.”

Little Mitchel came in; pinched and white and blue. His clothes were thin, not half warm enough for the weather, an old red woollen comforter was twisted round his neck. He took off his battered drab hat, and put his bread into it.

“Is that your dinner?” asked Mrs. Jacobson.

“Yes ’m,” said Dick, pulling the forelock of his light hair.

“But why did you not go home to-day?”

“Mother said there was nothing but bread for dinner to-day, and she give it me to bring away with my breakfast.”

“Well, why did you sit out in the cold? You might have gone indoors somewhere to eat it.”

“I were tired ’m,” was all Dick answered.

To look at him, one would say the “tired” state was chronic. He was shivering slightly all over with the cold; his teeth chattered. Mrs. Jacobson took his hand, and put him to sit on a low wooden stool close to the fire, and gave him a basin of the pea-soup.

“Let him have more if he can eat it,” she said to Mary when she went away. So the boy for once got well warmed and fed.

Now, it may be thought that Mrs. Jacobson,

being a kind old lady, might have told him to come in for some soup every cold day. And perhaps her will was good to do it. But it would never have answered. There were boys on the farm besides Dick, and no favour could be shown to one more than to another. No, nor to the boys more than to the men. Nor to the men on this farm more than to the men on that. Old Jacobson would have had his brother farmers pulling at his ears. Those of you acquainted with the subject will know all this.

And there's another thing I had better say. In telling of Dick Mitchel, it will naturally sound like an exceptional or isolated case, because those who read have their attention directed to this one and not to others. But, in actual fact, Dick's was only one of a great many; the Jacobsons had employed ploughboys and other boys always, lots of them; some strong and some weak, just as the boys might happen to be. For a young boy to be out with the plough in the cold winter weather, seems to a farmer and a farmer's men nothing: it lies in the common course of events. He has to get through as he best can; he must work to eat; and as a compensating balance there comes the genial warmth and the easy work of summer. Dick Mitchel was but one of the race; the carter and ploughman, his masters, had begun life exactly as he did, had gone through the same

ordeal, the hardships of a long winter's day and the frost and snow. Dick Mitchel was as capable of his duties as many another had been. Dick's father had been little and weakly in his boyhood, but he got over that and grew as strong as the rest of them. Dick might have got over it, too, but for some extraordinary weather that came in.

Mrs. Jacobson had been in Oxfordshire a week when old Jacobson started to fetch her home, intending to stay there two or three days. The weather since she left had been going on in the same stupid way ; a thin coating of snow to be seen one day, the green of the fields the next. But on the morning after old Jacobson started, the frost set in with a vengeance, and we got our skates out. Another day came in, and the Squire declared he had never felt anything to equal the cold. We had not had it as sharp for years : and then, you see, he was too fat to skate. The best skating was on a pond on old Jacobson's land, which they called the lake from its size.

It was on this second day that I came across Dick Mitchel. Hastening home from the lake-pond after dark—for we had skated till we couldn't see and then kept on by moonlight—the skates in my hand and all aglow with heat, who should be sitting by the bank on this side the crooked stile instead of getting over it, but little Mitchel. But for the moon shining right

on his face, I might have passed without seeing him.

"You are taking it airily, young Dick. Got the gout?"

Dick just lifted his head and stared a little ; but didn't speak.

"Come ! Why don't you go home ?"

"I'm tired," murmured Dick. "I'm cold."

"Get up. I'll help you over the stile."

He did as he was bid at once. We had got well on down the lane, and I had my hand on his shoulder to steady him, for his legs seemed to slip about like Punch's in the show, when he turned suddenly back again.

"The harness."

"The what ?" I said.

Something seemed the matter with the boy : it was just as if he had partly lost the power of ready speech, or had been struck stupid. I made out at last that he had left some harness on the ground, which he was ordered to take to the blacksmith's.

"I'll get over for it, Dick. You stop where you are."

It was lying where he had been sitting ; a short strap with a torn buckle. Dick took it and we went on again.

"Were you asleep, just now, Dick?"

"No, sir. It were the moon."

"What was the moon?"

"I were looking into it. Mother says God's

all above there : I thought happen I might see Him."

A long explanation for Dick to-night. The recovery of the strap seemed to have brightened up his intellect.

"You'll never see Him in this world, Dick. He sees you always."

"And that's what mother says. He sees I can't do more nor my arms'll let me. I'd not like Him to think I can."

"All right, Dick. You only do your best always : He won't fail to see it."

I had hardly said the last words when down went Dick without warning, face foremost. Picking him up, I took a look into his eyes by the moon's light.

"What did you do that for, Dick ?"

"I don't know."

"Is it your legs ?"

"Yes, it's my legs. I didn't mean it. I didn't mean it when I fell under the horses to-day, but Hall he beated of me and said I did."

After that I did not loose him ; or I'm sure he would have gone down again. Arrived at his cottage, he was for passing it.

Don't you know your own door, Dick Mitchel ?"

"It's the strap," he said. "I ha' got to take it to Cawson's."

"Oh, I'll step round with that. Let's see what there is to do."

He seemed unwilling, saying he must take it

back to Hall in the morning. Very well, I said, so he could. We went in at his door: and at first I thought I must have got into a black fog. The room was a narrow poking place; but I couldn't see to the other end of it. Two children were coughing, one choking, one crying. Mrs. Mitchel's face, ornamented with blacks, gradually loomed out to view through the atmosphere.

"It be the chimbley, sir. I hope you'll please to excuse it. It don't smoke as bad as this except when the weather's cold beyond common."

"It's to be hoped it doesn't. I should call it rather miserable if it did."

"Yes, sir. Mitchel, he says he thinks the chimbley must have frozed."

"Look here, Mrs. Mitchel, I've brought Dick home: I found him sitting in the cold on the other side of the stile yonder, and my belief is, he thought he could not get over it. He is about as weak as a young rat."

"It's the frost, sir," she said. "The boys all feel it that has to be out and about. It'll soon be gone, Dick. This here biting cold don't never last long."

Dick was standing against her, bending his face on her old stuff gown. She put her arm about him kindly.

"No, it can't last long, Mrs. Mitchel. Could he not be kept in doors until it gives a bit—let him have a holiday? No. Wouldn't it do?"

She opened her eyes wide at this, braving the cloud of flying blacks. Such a thing as keeping a ploughboy at home for a holiday, had never entered her imagination at its widest range.

“Why, Master Ludlow, sir, he’d lose his place!”

“But, suppose he were ill, and had to stay at home?”

“Then the Lord help us, if it came to that! Please, sir, his wages might be stopped. I’ve heard of a master paying in illness, though it’s not many of ’em as would, but I’ve never knowed ’em pay for holidays. The biting cold will go soon, Dick,” she added, looking at him; “don’t be downhearted.”

“I should give him a cup of hot tea, Mrs. Mitchel, and let him go to bed. Good night; I’m off.”

I would have liked to say beer instead of tea; it would have put a bit of strength into the boy; but I might just as well have suggested wine, for all they had of either. Leaving the strap at the blacksmith’s—it was but a minute or two out of my road—I told him to send it up to Mitchel’s as soon as it was done.

“I daresay!” was what I got in answer.

“Look here, Cawson: the lad’s ill, and his father was not in the way. If you don’t choose to let your boy run up with that, or take it yourself, you shall never have another job of work from the Squire if I can prevent it.”

"I'll send it, sir," said Cawson, coming to his senses. Not that he had much from us: we mostly patronised Dovey, down in Piefinch Cut.

Now, all this happened: as Duffham and others could testify if necessary; it is not put in to make up a story. But I never thought worse of Dick than that he was done over for the moment with the cold.

Of all days in remembrance, the next was the worst. The cold was more intense—though that had seemed impossible; and a fierce wind was blowing that cut you in two. It kept us from skating—and that's saying a good deal. We got half-way to the lake-pond, and couldn't stand it, so turned home again. Jacobson's team was out, braving the weather: we saw it at a distance.

"What a fool that waggoner must be to bring out the team to-day!" cried Tod. "He can't do any good on this hard ground. He must be doing it for bravado. It is a sign his master's not at home."

In the afternoon, when a good hot meal had put warmth into us, we thought we'd be off again; and this time gained the pond. The wind was like a rough knife: I never skated in such before: but we kept on till dusk.

Going homewards, in passing Glebe Cottage, which lay away on the left, we caught sight of three or four people standing before it.

"What's to do there?" asked Tod of a man, expecting to hear that old Mrs. Parry had a second stroke.

"Sum'at's wrong wi' Jacobson's ploughboy," was the answer. "He has just been took in there."

"Jacobson's ploughboy! Why, Tod, that must be Dick Mitchel."

"And what if it is!" returned Tod, starting off again. "The youngster's half frozen, I daresay. Let us get home, Johnny. What are you stopping for?"

By saying "half frozen" he meant nothing. Not a thought of real ill was in his mind. I went across to the house; and met Hall the ploughman coming out of it.

"Is Dick Mitchel ill, Hall?"

"He ought to be, sir; if he bain't shamming," returned Hall, crustily. "He have fell down five times since noon, and the last time wouldn't get up upon his feet again nohow. Being close a-nigh the old lady's I carried of him in."

Hall went back to the house with me. I don't think he much liked the boy's looks. Dick had been put to lie on the warm brick floor before the kitchen fire, a blanket on his legs, and his head on a cushion. Mrs. Parry was ill in bed upstairs. The servant looked a stupid young country girl, seemingly born without wits.

"Have you given him anything?" I asked her.

"Please sir, I've put the kettle on to bile."

"Is there any brandy in the house?"

"*Brandy!*" the girl exclaimed with wonder. No. Her missis never took nothing stronger nor tea and water gruel.

"Hall," I said, looking at the man, "somebody must go for Mr. Duffham. And Dick's mother might as well be told."

Bill Leet, a strapping young fellow standing by, made off at this, saying he'd bring them both. Hall went away to his waiting team, and I stooped over the boy.

"What is the matter, Dick? Tell me how you feel."

Except that Dick smiled a little, he made no answer. His eyes, gazing up into mine, looked dim. The girl had taken away the candle, but the fire was bright. As I took one of his hands to rub it, his fingers clasped themselves round mine. Then he began to say something, with a stop between each word. I had to bend down close to catch it.

"He—brought—that—there—strap."

"All right, Dick."

"Thank—ee—sir."

"Are you in any pain, Dick?"

"No."

"Or cold?"

"No."

The girl came back with a candle and some hot milk in a tea-cup. I put a tea-spoonful into Dick's mouth. But he could not swallow it. Who should come rushing in then but old Jones the constable, wanting to know what was up.

"Well I never!—why, that's Mitchel's Dick!" cried Jones, peering down in the candle-light. "What's took *him*?"

"Jones, if you and the girl will rub his hands, I'll go and get some brandy. We can't let him lie like this and give him nothing."

Old Jones, liking the word brandy on his own score, knelt down on his fat gouty legs with a groan, and laid hold of one of the hands, the girl taking the other. I went leaping off to Elm Farm.

And went for nothing. Mr. and Mrs. Jacobson being out, the cellar was locked up, and no brandy could be got at. The cook gave me a bottle of gooseberry wine; which she said might do as well if hotted up.

Duffham was stooping over the boy when I got back, his face long, and his cane lying on the ironing-board. Bill Leet had met him half-way, so no time was lost. He was putting something into Dick's lips with a teaspoon—perhaps brandy. But it ran the wrong way; out instead of in. Dick never stirred, and his eyes were shut. The doctor got up.

"Too late, Johnny," he whispered.

The words startled me. "Mr. Duffham! No?"

He looked into my eyes, and nodded YES. "The exposure to-day has been too much for him. He is going fast."

And just at that moment Hannah Mitchel came in. I have often thought that the extreme poor, whose lives are but one vast hardship from the cradle to the grave, who have to struggle always, do not feel strong emotion. At any rate, they don't show much. Hannah Mitchel knelt down, and looked quietly at the white and shrunken face.

"Dicky," she said, putting his hair gently back from his brow; which had now a damp moisture on it. "What's amiss, Dicky?"

He opened his eyes at the voice and feebly lifted one hand towards her. Mrs. Mitchel glanced round at the doctor's face; and I think she read the truth there. She gathered his poor head into her arms, and let it rest on her bosom. Her old black shawl was on, her bonnet fell backwards and hung from her neck by the strings.

"Oh, Dicky! Dicky!"

He lay still, looking at her. She gave one sob and choked the rest down.

"Be he dying, sir?—ain't there no hope?" she cried to Mr. Duffham, who was standing in the blaze of the fire. And the doctor just moved his head for answer.

There was a still hush in the kitchen. Her tears began to fall down her cheeks slowly and softly.

“Dicky, wouldn’t you like to say ‘Our Father’?”

“I—’ve—said—it,—mother.”

“You’ve always been a good boy, Dicky.”

Old Jones blew his nose; the stupid girl burst into a sob. Mr. Duffham told them to hush.

Dick’s eyes were slowly closing. The breath was very faint now, and came at long intervals. Presently Mr. Duffham took him from his mother, and laid him down flat, without the cushion.

Well, he died. Poor little Dicky Mitchel died. And I think, taking the wind and the work into consideration, that he was better off.

Mr. Jacobson got back the next day. He sharply taxed the ploughman with the death, saying he ought to have seen the state the boy was in on that last bitter day, and have sent him home. But Hall declared he never thought anything ailed the boy, except that the cold was cutting him more than ordinary, just as it was cutting everybody else.

The county coroner came over to hold the inquest. The jury, after hearing what Mr. Duffham had to say, brought it in that Richard Mitchel died from exposure to the cold during the recent remarkable severity of the weather,

not having sufficient stamina to resist it. Some of the local newspapers took it up, being in want of matter that dreary season. They attacked the farmers; asking the public whether labourers' children were to be held as of no more value than this, in a free and generous country like England, and why they were made to work so young by such hard and wicked task-masters as the master of Elm Farm. That put the master of Elm Farm on his mettle. He retorted by a letter of sharp good sense; finishing it with a demand to know whether the farmers were expected to club together to provide meat and puddings gratis for the flocks of children that labourers chose to gather about them. The Squire read it aloud to everybody, as the soundest letter he'd ever seen written.

"I am afraid their view is the right one—that the children are too thick on the ground, poor things," sighed Mrs. Todhetley. "Any way, Johnny, it is very hard on the young ones to have to work as poor little Dick did; late and early, wet or dry: and I am glad for his sake that God has taken him."

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